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(71) Applicant: **SEIKO EPSON CORPORATION**
Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo (JP)

(72) Inventors:
• **Usui, Minoru**
Suwa-shi, Nagano (JP)
• **Miyazawa, Hisashi**
Suwa-shi, Nagano (JP)

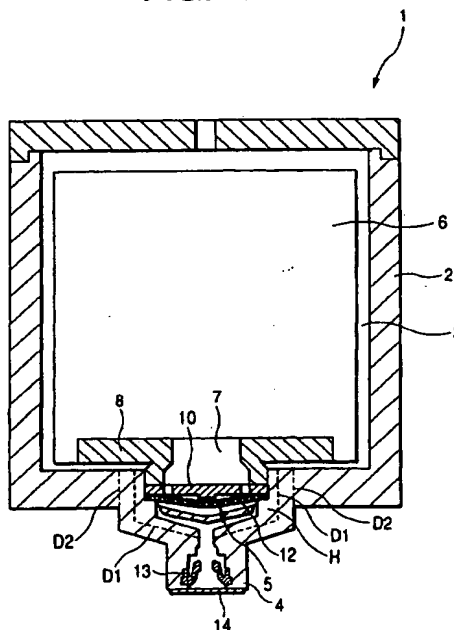
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(74) Representative: **HOFFMANN - EITLE**
Patent- und Rechtsanwälte
Arabellastrasse 4
81925 München (DE)

(54) **Ink cartridge for ink jet recording apparatus, connection unit and ink jet recording apparatus**

(57) An ink cartridge (1) for supplying the ink in an ink reserving chamber (3) via an ink supply port (4) into a recording head (21) has a differential pressure valve mechanism (5) disposed between an ink flow port (7) and the ink supply port (4) in the ink reserving chamber (3), whereby the ink is supplied an adequate amount to the recording head (21) by opening or closing the differential pressure valve mechanism (5) in accordance with an ink pressure of the recording head (21). As a result, it is possible to supply the ink at a substantially constant pressure to the recording head without regard to the variation in the amount of ink or the movement of the carriage.

FIG. 1



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Description**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****Field of the Invention**

[0001] The present invention relates to an ink supplying system such as an ink cartridge, a connection unit, etc., for supplying ink to an ink jet recording head that ejects ink droplets in response to a print signal. The present invention also relates to a recording apparatus using such an ink supplying system.

Related Art

[0002] In a recording apparatus of the type in which ink is supplied to an ink jet recording head from an ink cartridge that is detachably mounted on a carriage having the recording head thereon, the cartridge is constructed such that the ink is filled in a flexible ink bag and the ink bag is accommodated in a hard case as disclosed, for example, in Europe Patent No.562717.

[0003] Since the ink cartridge thus constructed has no porous member, the ink cartridge can efficiently utilize the container volume of the ink cartridge to accommodate a large quantity of ink, thereby improving the ratio of the ink quantity per the container volume in comparison to an ink cartridge having the ink impregnated in a porous member.

[0004] However, since the ink is not held under a capillary force of the porous member, a liquid column of the accommodated ink directly acts on the recording head to change the ink pressure on the recording head depending on a change in quantity of ink. Further, pressure fluctuation acts on the recording head, which is caused by motion of the ink due to the reciprocal movement of the carriage. Consequently, the print quality is degraded.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] An ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, provided according to the present invention, comprises:

a flexible ink bag storing ink therein and having an ink flow port;
a case member storing the ink bag therein;
an ink supply port which supplies ink in the ink bag to a recording head; and
a negative pressure generating system which is provided between the ink flow port and the ink supply port, and which maintains pressure of the ink supply port to be lower by a specified valve than pressure in the ink bag.

[0006] Another ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, provided according to the present invention,

comprises:

an ink storing chamber;
an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition in a first state in which the ink cartridge is not attached on a recording apparatus;
an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition in the first state; and
a negative pressure generating system which supplies ink to the ink supplying connection port while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure state.

[0007] Yet another ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, provided according to the present invention, comprises:

an ink storing chamber;
an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition in a first state in which the ink cartridge is not attached to the recording apparatus; and
an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition in the first state,
wherein ink is supplied from the ink cartridge to a recording head via a connection unit that has a negative pressure generating system and that is provided to the recording apparatus.

[0008] Accordingly, it is a first object of the invention to provide an ink cartridge that can supply ink to a recording head at a pressure as constant as possible regardless of change in ink quantity and movement of a carriage.

[0009] It is a second object of the invention to provide an connection unit that connects an ink cartridge to a recording head and that can supply ink to a recording head at a pressure as constant as possible to a recording head regardless of change in ink quantity and movement of a carriage.

[0010] It is a third object of the invention to provide a recording apparatus employing the ink cartridge and/or the connection unit.

[0011] The present disclosure relates to the subject matter contained in Japanese patent application Nos.:

2000-37410 (filed on February 16, 2000);
2000-85989 (filed on March 27, 2000);
2000-85791 (filed on March 27, 2000);
2000-86007 (filed on March 27, 2000);
2000-92802 (filed on March 30, 2000);
2000-229167 (filed on July 28, 2000);
2000-228542 (filed on July 28, 2000); and

2000-229166 (filed on July 28, 2000),

which are expressly incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] Fig. 1 is a view illustrating one example of an ink cartridge according to the present invention.

[0013] Figs. 2A and 2B are views illustrating, in enlargement, a closed valve condition and an open valve condition of a differential pressure valve mechanism constituting a negative pressure generating system of the ink cartridge, respectively.

[0014] Fig. 3 is a view illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is attached to a carriage.

[0015] Fig. 4 is a perspective view illustrating one example of the ink cartridge of the invention.

[0016] Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the ink cartridge.

[0017] Fig. 6 is an exploded perspective view of the ink cartridge.

[0018] Figs. 7A and 7B are views illustrating how ink flows in the differential pressure valve mechanism constituting the negative pressure generating system of the ink cartridge.

[0019] Fig. 8 is a view illustrating a structure in cross section of the differential pressure valve mechanism and how ink flows.

[0020] Fig. 9 is a partial cross-sectional view illustrating one example of a connection unit.

[0021] Fig. 10 is a partial cross-sectional view illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

[0022] Fig. 11 is a view illustrating one example of the ink cartridge of the invention.

[0023] Fig. 12 is a cross-sectional view of the one example of the ink cartridge.

[0024] Fig. 13 is a partial cross-sectional view illustrating one example of a connection unit that is suitable for the ink cartridge.

[0025] Fig. 14 is a partial cross-sectional view illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

[0026] Fig. 15 is a view illustrating one example of a connection unit for connecting the ink cartridge and a recording head.

[0027] Fig. 16 is a view illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

[0028] Figs. 17A and 17B are views illustrating one example of a capping system.

[0029] Figs. 18A and 18B are views illustrating a capped state when ink is sucked, and a rest state, respectively.

[0030] Figs. 19A and 19B are views illustrating one example of a capping system in a state where the ink is sucked and in a rest state, respectively.

[0031] Fig. 20 is a perspective view illustrating one ex-

ample of an ink cartridge according to the invention.

[0032] Fig. 21 is a cross-sectional view illustrating the one example of the ink cartridge.

[0033] Fig. 22 is an exploded perspective view of the one example of the ink cartridge.

[0034] Figs. 23A and 23B are views illustrating how ink flows in a negative pressure generating system of the ink cartridge, respectively.

[0035] Figs. 24A and 24B are a front view and a cross-sectional view illustrating one example of the connection unit, respectively.

[0036] Figs. 25A, 25B and 25C are views illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit, an ink injecting process, and a structure of the tip end of a syringe, respectively.

[0037] Figs. 26A and 26B are views illustrating one example of the ink cartridge of the invention, and a concave portion of the ink cartridge in enlargement.

[0038] Fig. 27 is a view illustrating a structure of the back face of the one example of the ink cartridge.

[0039] Fig. 28 is a view illustrating a cross-sectional structure of the one example of the ink cartridge.

[0040] Figs. 29A and 29B are views illustrating one example of a valve plug for use in the ink cartridge, respectively.

[0041] Fig. 30 is an exploded perspective view illustrating one example of the connection unit in the recording unit on which the ink cartridge is attached.

[0042] Fig. 31 is a view illustrating a cross-sectional structure of the one example of the connection unit.

[0043] Fig. 32 is a cross-sectional view illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

[0044] Figs. 33A and 33B are cross-sectional views illustrating in enlargement the state of the valve plugs in an atmosphere communicating end connection and an ink supply port in which the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit, respectively.

[0045] Figs. 34A and 34B are views typically illustrating the structure of a flow passage in a state where the ink cartridge is not attached to the connection unit and in a state where the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit, respectively.

[0046] Figs. 35A, 35B and 35C are perspective views illustrating the ink supply port exploded and in enlargement, respectively.

[0047] Figs. 36A and 36B are views illustrating a state where the ink cartridge is pulled out, and a state of the ink supply port in a process where the ink cartridge is attached, respectively.

[0048] Fig. 37 is a view illustrating how ink is consumed in the connection unit and the ink cartridge.

[0049] Fig. 38 is a view illustrating how ink is consumed in another example of the connection unit.

[0050] Fig. 39 is a configuration view illustrating another application example of the connection unit of the invention.

[0051] Fig. 40 is a view illustrating one example of an

ink jet recording apparatus employing the ink cartridge and the connection unit.

[0052] Figs. 41A, 41B and 41C are a perspective view illustrating one example of a cartridge replacement mechanism of the ink jet recording apparatus, and views illustrating an attached state and a pulled-out state, respectively.

[0053] Figs. 42A and 42B are views illustrating one example of the ink cartridge that is suitable for the recording apparatus, respectively.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0054] Fig. 1 illustrates a first example of an ink cartridge according to the present invention. A hard case 2 constituting the ink cartridge 1 includes an ink storing chamber 3 for storing ink filled in a flexible ink bag 6. The hard case 2 is formed with an ink supply port 4 engageable with an ink supply needle 22 (see Fig. 3) of a carriage at the lower end. Between the ink storing chamber 3 and the ink supply port 4, a differential pressure valve mechanism 5 constituting a negative pressure generating system is arranged such that an ink flow port 7 of the ink bag 6 is communicated via the differential pressure valve mechanism 5 to the ink supply port 4.

[0055] The ink bag 6 is formed of an aluminum foil that has an ink proof property in an inner face and that is formed with a high polymer layer. The ink bag 6 is preliminarily bent at both sides thereof to be smoothly flattened depending on the decrease in quantity of ink accommodated therein. The ink bag 6 is sealed by a sealing member 8 having the ink flow port 7. Degassed ink obtained by pressure reduction process is accommodated in the ink bag 9.

[0056] The differential pressure valve mechanism 5 is constructed such that a valve seat formation member 10 formed with ink flow ports 9 and a valve seat 10a are arranged on the upstream side, and a diaphragm valve or a membrane valve 12 formed with a flow port 11 is arranged on the downstream side to be constantly urged toward the valve seat formation member, as shown in Fig. 2A.

[0057] The diaphragm valve 12 has its resiliency adjusted so that if pressure of ink in the ink supply port 4 is decreased to a predetermined value, the diaphragm valve 12 is displaced downward in the figure to be separated from the valve seat formation member 10, thereby opening the ink flow port 11, as shown in Fig. 2B. In Fig. 1, reference numeral 13 denotes a packing member provided at the tip end of the ink supply port 4, and reference numeral 14 denotes a sealing film through which an ink supply needle can be penetrated.

[0058] In this example, the ink supply needle 22 in communication with the recording head 21 mounted on a carriage 20 is inserted into the ink supply port 4 of the ink cartridge 1 as shown in Fig. 3. Subsequently, when the recording head 21 is sealed by a capping system, and a negative pressure is exerted on the recording

head 21, the diaphragm valve 12 is separated from the valve seat 10a as shown in Fig. 2B so that ink in the ink bag 6 flows through an ink induction passage 23 into the recording head 21.

5 [0059] When the recording head 21 is completely, filled with ink in this manner, the negative pressure in the ink supply port 4 is decreased, so that the diaphragm valve 12 comes into contact with the valve seat 10a, owing to its resiliency, thereby closing an ink flow passage
10 between the ink bag 6 and the recording head 21, as shown in Fig. 2A.

[0060] If the printing is started, the ink is consumed by the recording head 21. In this state, since the ink flow passage between the ink bag 6 and the recording head 21 is closed by the diaphragm valve 12, the recording head 21 is not adversely affected by pressure changes due to the motion of the ink in the ink bag 6 caused by the reciprocal movement of the carriage 20.

[0061] If the ink in a valve chamber 15 also serving as an ink reserving portion is consumed in this way and the negative pressure in the ink supply port 4 is increased, the diaphragm valve 12 is moved downward in the figure to be separated from the valve seat 10a. As a result, the ink in the ink bag 6 flows into the ink recording head 21.
25 If the ink flows into the valve chamber 15 by an amount corresponding to the ink consumed by recording, the negative pressure in the ink supply port 4 is decreased, so that the diaphragm valve 12 comes into contact with the valve seat 10a again.

[0062] By repeating the above process, the ink in the ink bag 6 is supplied at appropriate timings into the recording head 21. The amount of ink in the ink bag 6 to be supplied via the diaphragm valve 12 into the recording head 21, i.e. the water head value of ink, does not act directly on the recording head 21. Therefore, the change in ink amount does not vary the print quality.

[0063] Thus, the ink in the ink bag 6 is placed in a communicating state with the recording head 21 only during the recording operation. The ink bag 6 is in communication with the atmosphere via the diaphragm valve 12 and the nozzle openings of the recording head 21 during the recording operation, and the ink bag 6 supplies the ink of an amount in conformity with an amount of the ink consumed by the recording head 21, owing to the resiliency of the ink bag 6. On the other hand, because the diaphragm valve 12 is closed in a non-printing state, the ink bag 6 is isolated from the outside air to prevent the ink solvent from evaporating or the atmosphere from entering into the bag 6. Accordingly, the degassed rate of the ink can be maintained for the long time.

[0064] If the ink is consumed by recording and the amount of ink in the ink bag 6 is decreased, the ink bag 6 receiving the atmospheric pressure is gradually flattened in accordance with the folding habit until all the ink of the ink bag 6 is supplied to the recording head 21.

[0065] Since the ink is sealingly accommodated in the ink bag, the ink solvent in the ink bag is prevented from

evaporating, and thus the ink in the ink bag can be used for printing for the longer time in comparison with an ink cartridge which stores ink in a container having an atmosphere communication hole.

[0066] In the above example, the diaphragm valve 12 is disposed horizontally, but may be disposed vertically by changing the ink flow passage. In this case, the same effect can be obtained.

[0067] In this example, an ink induction passage formation portion 123 defining the ink induction passage 23 is integrally provided to the hard case 2, the sealing member 8 supporting the valve seat formation member 10 is sealingly provided to the ink bag 6 by, for example, thermal welding, and the diaphragm valve 12 is interposed between and held by the valve seat formation member 10 and the part of the hard case 2 located above the ink induction passage formation portion 123 when the ink bag 6 with the valve seat formation member 10 is assembled into the hard case 2. Other than the above-mentioned assembly method, various methods can be adopted to construct the ink cartridge 1 of the present invention. For example, the diaphragm valve 12 may be preliminarily fixed to the valve seat formation member 10, and the ink bag 6 with the sealing member 8, the valve seat formation member 10 and the diaphragm valve 12 may be fixed in place to the hard case 2. Alternatively, as shown by dotted line D1 in Fig. 1, the ink bag 6 may have a hollow cylindrical portion H that is attached to the sealing member 8 and that holds the valve seat formation member 10, the diaphragm valve 12 and the ink induction passage formation portion 123 in cooperation with the sealing member 8; and the ink bag 6 may be fixed to the hard case 2 in such a manner that the hollow portion H is set on an internal recessed portion of the hard case 2 to communicate the ink induction passage 23 with the ink supply port 4. Alternatively, as shown by dotted line D2 in Fig. 1, the ink bag 6 may have the sealing member 8, the valve seat formation member 10, the diaphragm valve 12, the ink induction passage formation portion 123 and the ink supply port 4 as a unit, and the ink bag 6 thus constructed may be fixed to a hole portion of the hard case 2.

[0068] Figs. 4 to 6 illustrate a second example of an ink cartridge of the invention. The ink cartridge 31 is formed with an ink storing chamber 32 extending vertically on one side, and a negative pressure generating system 33 on the other side. The ink cartridge 31 is further formed with an atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and an ink supplying connection port 35 that are respectively located at an upper part and a lower part with respect to the ink storing chamber 32. Each of the ports 34 and 35 is cylindrical in shape to be connected to an external system.

[0069] The connection port 34, 35 has a communication window 34a, 35a on its peripheral face, and accommodates therein an axially movable valve member 40, 50 (see Fig. 6). The valve member 40, 50 includes a slide shaft 41, 51 having one end 41a, 51a projecting

from the connection port 34, 35 in a closed valve condition, and the other end to which a packing 43, 53 made of a resilient material is fitted. The packing 43, 53 is used to seal an opening 42, 52 communicated with the connection port 34, 35. The slide shaft 41, 51 is inserted into the connection port 34, 35 so that the packing 43, 53 is elastically contacted with the opening 42, 53 by the action of a spring 44, 54.

[0070] With this constitution, if the ink cartridge 31 is attached to a connection unit 80 (described later), both of the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and the ink supplying connection port 35 are maintained in an open valve condition in which ink can be supplied to the recording head.

[0071] As shown in Fig. 6, the negative pressure generating system 33 is constructed such that a diaphragm valve or membrane valve 61 and a flow passage formation member 62 serving also as a fixing member fixing the outer periphery of the diaphragm valve 61 are accommodated within a valve chamber 60 of a recessed portion that is circular in cross section and that is in communication with the ink storing chamber 32. The region including one side of the negative pressure generating system 33 and one side of the ink storing chamber 32 is sealed with a film 63 having the air impermeable property. The valve chamber 60 is formed with a convex or protruded portion 64 at its center, and the diaphragm valve 61 is formed with a through hole 65 at a position opposed to the convex portion 64.

[0072] Figs. 7A and 7B are views illustrating an ink flow passage provided in the negative pressure system 33 at the front side and the back side, respectively. As shown in Figs. 7A and 7B, and also in Fig. 8, ink in the ink storing chamber 32 is supplied to the ink supplying connection port 35 such that the ink flows from the ink storing chamber 32 to a filter 66 (1), from a passage hole 67 via a flow passage 68 into a passage hole 69 of the valve chamber 60 (2), along the diaphragm valve 61 (3), from the through hole 65 via passage holes 70 and 71 of the valve chamber 60 to a passage hole 72 along a flow passage 73 connecting the passage holes 70, 71 and 72 (4), and from the passage hole 72 to a passage hole 74 communicating with the ink supplying connection port 35 along a flow passage 75 (5).

[0073] Fig. 8 illustrates a cross-sectional structure of the negative pressure generating system 33, in which the diaphragm valve 61 is formed as a diaphragm having a thick peripheral portion, and the through hole 65 is elastically biased onto the convex portion 64 by a spring 77. The resilient force of the spring 77 is set so that the ink can be supplied depending on the recording operation, while maintaining a negative ink pressure on the recording head.

[0074] Fig. 9 illustrates a first example of a connection unit 80 provided to a main body of the recording apparatus. A main body 83 of the connection unit 80 has walls 81, 82 coincident in shape with a front face and a bottom face of the ink cartridge 31, respectively, and is formed

with the recessed portions 84, 85 for receiving the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and the ink supplying connection port 35 of the ink cartridge 31, and forcing the valve members 40, 50 to be retracted to be open, respectively.

[0075] The recessed portion 84 engaging the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 is opened via a capillary 87 formed on the surface of the main body to the atmosphere, and the recessed portion 85 is connected via a communication hole 88 to the recording head 89.

[0076] With such constitution, if the ink cartridge 31 in which ink is filled is attached to the connection unit 80 so that the connection ports 34, 35 are respectively inserted into the recessed portions 84, 85 as shown in Fig. 10, the valve members 40, 50 are respectively pressed by walls 84a, 85a of the recessed portions 84, 85 to establish the valve open condition. Consequently, the ink storing chamber 32 of the ink cartridge 31 is communicated via the capillary 87 with the atmosphere, so that the ink can be supplied from the ink storing chamber 32 through the communication hole 88 into the recording head 89.

[0077] If the ink is consumed by the recording head 89 during printing, and the negative pressure in the ink supplying connection port 35 is increased, the diaphragm valve 61 receiving ink pressure of the ink storing chamber 32 is separated from the protruded portion 64 against a biasing force of the spring 77, because the differential pressure between the front and back sides of the diaphragm valve 61 is increased. Consequently, the through hole 65 of the diaphragm valve 61 is opened, and the passage holes 69 and 72 are communicated with each other, so that the ink flows into the ink supplying connection port 35.

[0078] If the ink flows into the recording head 89 to decrease the negative pressure of the ink supplying connection port 35, the diaphragm valve 61 is pressed onto the protruded portion 64 by the biasing force of the spring 77 so that the through hole 65 is sealed by the protruded portion 64. In this way, the diaphragm valve 61 is repeatedly connected with and separated from the protruded portion 64 to maintain the ink pressure of the ink supplying connection port 35 at a constant negative pressure.

[0079] If the ink cartridge 31 is removed from the connection unit 80 for the replacement to change print mode or the like, the valve members 40, 50 of the connection ports 34, 35 are released from supports, and are closed by the action of the springs 44, 54, so that the ink storing chamber 32 is shut from the atmosphere. Therefore, even in the state where the ink cartridge 31 is removed from the recording apparatus during the use, it is possible to prevent the ink from leaking or the ink solvent from evaporating, thereby enabling the storage of the ink cartridge for the long time.

[0080] In order that a top end 41a of the slide shaft 41 in the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 is

pressed by the wall of the recessed portion 84 at a relatively earlier timing than a top end 51a of the slide shaft 51 in the ink supplying end connection 35 is pressed by the wall of the recessed portion 85, it is preferable that the protruded length of the top end 41a is set longer than the protruded length of the top end 51a or a projection is formed on the wall 84a. This makes it possible to avoid any inconveniences caused due to a difference in pressure between the ink chamber and the atmosphere, namely, the leakage of the ink or the suction of the atmosphere via the recording head 89.

[0081] Figs. 11 and 12 illustrate a third example of the ink cartridge 31 of the invention, in which the ink supplying connection port 35' is formed as a simple open port. In this example, until an ink cartridge 31' is attached to a connection unit 80', the valve member 40 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 keeps a closed valve condition with the aid of the biasing force of the spring 44, and the diaphragm valve 61 of the negative pressure system 33 also keeps a closed valve condition. Therefore, the ink in the ink storing chamber 32 does not leak through the ink supplying connection port 35'.

[0082] The mating connection unit 80' is formed with a recessed portion 85' having the communicating hole 88 communicating with the recording head 89, as shown in Fig. 13. If the ink cartridge 31' is attached, the valve member 40 is pressed by the wall 84a of the recessed portion 84 to establish the open valve condition. Consequently, the ink storing chamber 32 of the ink cartridge 31' is communicated via the capillary 87 to the atmosphere, so that the ink in the ink storing chamber 32 can be supplied through the communication hole 88 into the recording head 89.

[0083] In this example, since the ink storing chamber 32 is also shut out from the atmosphere by the valve member 40 of the connection port 34 and the negative pressure generating system 33, it is possible to prevent the ink from leaking or the ink solvent from evaporating, even if the ink cartridge 31' is removed from the recording apparatus during the use, thereby enabling the storage of the ink cartridge for the long time. In addition, it is preferable to seal the ink supplying connection port 35' with a cap or the like in order to prevent ink adhered to the vicinity of the ink supplying connection port 35' from being dried.

[0084] Fig. 15 illustrates a third example of a connection unit 90 adapted to the ink cartridge 31. A main body 93 of the connection unit 90 has walls 91, 92 coincident in shape with a front face and a bottom face of the ink cartridge 31, respectively, and is formed with the recessed portions 94, 95 for receiving the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and the ink supplying connection port 35 of the ink cartridge 31, and forcing the valve members 40, 50 to be retracted to be open, respectively.

[0085] The recessed portion 94 engaging the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 is communi-

cated via a capillary 97 formed on the surface of the main body with the recording head 89. That is, in this example, an atmosphere communication passage defined by the connection port 34 and the capillary 97 is opened at a surface of the recording head 89. The recessed portion 95 is communicated via a communication hole 98 with the recording head 89.

[0086] The recording head 89 receives the ink supply from the ink cartridge 31, and includes nozzle openings 100 from which ink pressurized by a pressure generating system is ejected as liquid droplets, and an atmosphere communicating port 102 communicated with an end portion 97a of the capillary 97.

[0087] With such constitution, if the ink cartridge storing ink therein is mounted so that the connection ports 34, 35 are inserted into the recessed portions 94, 95 of the connection unit 90, the valve members 40, 50 are pressed by the walls of the recessed portions 94, 95, respectively, as shown in Fig. 16, to establish the open valve condition in which the ink can be supplied from the ink storing chamber 32 into the recording head 89.

[0088] Fig. 17A illustrates one example of a capping mechanism 110, including a first cap 111 and a second cap 112. The first cap 111 is designed to selectively seal a region of the recording head 89 where the nozzle openings 100 are formed. The first cap 111 is communicated with an unillustrated ink suction pump via an opening 111a. The second cap 112 is designed to seal both the nozzle openings 100 and the atmosphere communicating port 102. The second cap 112 in this example, is formed with a recessed portion for defining a sealed space when the second cap 112 is contacted with the recording head 89, but the second cap 112 may be configured as a protruded base having a planar surface (113) that can be elastically contacted with the surface of a nozzle plate 101 to seal the nozzle openings 100 and the atmosphere communicating port 102 as shown in Fig. 17B. In this case also, the same effect can be obtained, as in the case of Fig. 17A.

[0089] As shown in Fig. 18A, if the first cap 111 of the capping system 110 seals the recording head 89 to apply a negative pressure to the recording head 89, a strong negative pressure acts on the ink supplying connection port 35 via the recording head 89 to open the diaphragm valve 61. Consequently, the ink in the ink storing chamber 32 flows into the recording head 89 so that the recording head 89 is filled with the ink.

[0090] In the case where a print failure occurs due to clogging of the nozzle openings 100 during the recording operation, if the recording head 89 is sealed by the first cap 101 and a negative pressure is applied to the recording head 89, in the same way as filling the ink into the cartridge as shown in Fig. 18A, the ink is forcibly discharged through the nozzle openings 100 of the recording head 89, thereby resolving the clogging.

[0091] In the case where the print operation is ended, the recording head 89 is moved to the second cap 112 of the capping system 110 and sealed thereby, the nozzle

openings 100 and the atmosphere communicating port 102 are both sealed as shown in Fig. 18B. Therefore, even if the ink cartridge 31 is inclined when the recording apparatus is moved, and the ink arrives at the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and leaks through the atmosphere communicating port 102, the ink can be received into the cap 112, and prevented from leaking out of the recording apparatus.

[0092] In the above example, separate caps are employed to seal a region where the nozzle openings 100 of the recording head 89 are formed and a region where the nozzle openings 100 and the atmosphere communicating port 102 are formed. However, as shown in Fig. 19a and 19B, the same cap 120 may be formed with a recessed portion 121 for sealing the region where the nozzle openings 100 are formed and a recessed portion 122 for sealing the atmosphere communicating port 102. In this case, a switch valve can be employed to communicate the recessed portion 121 with a suction pump, and the recessed portion 122 with the atmosphere, or to shut the recessed portion 122 from the atmosphere at the rest time, as shown in Fig. 19B, thereby exhibiting the same effect. In the example shown in Figs. 19A and 19B, only one switch valve 123 is provided to selectively communicate the recessed portion 122 with the atmosphere and isolate the recessed portion 122 from the atmosphere, and the recessed portion 121 is maintained in communication with the suction pump. However, another switch valve may be provided between the recessed portion 121 and the suction pump.

[0093] Figs. 20, 21 and 22 illustrate a fourth example of the ink cartridge of the invention, in which the same structure is adopted as in the previous examples, except that an ink injecting connection port and an ink flow port for supplying ink to the recording head are formed.

[0094] That is, this ink cartridge 130 is formed with the ink storing chamber 32 extending vertically on one side, and the negative pressure generating system 33 on the other side. The atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and an ink injecting connection port 131 are arranged at an upper part and a lower part with respect to the ink storing chamber 32. Each of the ports 34 and 131 is constructed by a cylindrical member that is connected to an external system. An ink flow port 132 for supplying the ink to the recording head is formed at the lowermost portion.

[0095] Each of the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and the ink injecting connection port 131 has a communication window 34a, 131a on its peripheral face, and accommodates an axially movable valve member 40, 140 therein. Each of the valve members 40, 140 includes a slide shaft 41, 141 having one end 41a, 141a projecting from the connection port 34, 131 in a closed valve condition, and the other end to which a packing 43, 143 made of a resilient material is fitted for sealing an opening 42, 142 communicated with the connection port 34, 131. The slide shaft 41, 141 is inserted into the connection port 34, 131 in such a manner that

the packing 43, 143 is elastically contacted with the opening 42, 142 by the action of a spring 44, 144.

[0096] With this constitution, if the ink cartridge 130 is attached to a connection unit, the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 is maintained in an open valve condition. However, the ink injecting connection port 131 is maintained in a closed valve condition, and opened only when an ink injector is inserted (described later).

[0097] Similarly to the aforementioned examples, the negative pressure generating system 33 is constructed, as shown in Fig. 22, such that the diaphragm valve 61 and the flow passage formation member 62 serving as a fixing member for fixing the outer periphery of the diaphragm valve 61 are accommodated within the valve chamber 60 formed into the recessed portion that is circular in cross section, and that is in communication with the ink storing chamber 32. The region including one side of the negative pressure generating system 33 and one side of the ink storing chamber 32 is sealed by the film 63 having the air impermeable property. The valve chamber 60 is formed with the convex or protruded portion 64 at its center, and the diaphragm valve 61 is formed with the through hole 65 at a position corresponding to the protruded portion 64.

[0098] Figs. 23A and 23B are views illustrating the ink flow passage provided in the negative pressure generating system 33 at the front side and the back side, respectively. Similarly to the aforementioned examples, ink flows from the ink storing chamber 32 to the filter 66 (1), from the passage hole 67 via the flow passage 68 into the passage hole 69 of the valve chamber 60 (2), along the diaphragm valve 61 (3), from the passage holes 70 and 71 of the valve chamber 60 to the passage hole 72 along the flow passage 73 connecting the passage holes 70, 71 and 72 (4), and from the passage hole 72 through the flow passage 75 to the passage hole 74 communicating with the ink flow port 132 (5). Reference numeral 133 denotes a packing that is fitted into the ink flow port 132.

[0099] Fig. 24 illustrates a fourth example of the connection unit. A main body 153 of the connection unit 150 has the walls 151, 152 in conformity in shape with a front face and a bottom face of the ink cartridge, respectively. The main body 153 and is formed with a recessed portion 154, a through hole 155 and a recessed portion 156 which respectively receive the atmosphere communicating connection port 34, the ink injecting connection port 131, and the ink flow port 132 of the ink cartridge 130.

[0100] The recessed portion 154 engaging the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 is opened via a capillary 157 formed on the surface of the main body to the atmosphere, and is internally formed with a wall 154a for pressing the valve member 40 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 34.

[0101] The through hole 155 for receiving the ink injecting connection 131 port does not have such a wall.

as to contact the valve member 140 of the ink cartridge 130, and accordingly, the ink injecting connection port 131 is maintained at a closed valve condition even if the ink cartridge 130 is attached to the connection unit 150.

5 The recessed portion 156 connected to the ink flow port 132 is communicated with the recording head 89 via a communication hole 158.

[0102] With such constitution, the ink cartridge 130 storing the ink therein is connected to the connection unit 130 such that the ink flow port 132 is positioned with respect to the recessed portion 156, and then the upper part of the cartridge 130 is pivoted toward the connection unit 130, as shown in Fig. 25A.

[0103] Since the diaphragm valve 61 keeps a closed valve condition, until the ink cartridge 130 is attached to the connection unit 150, the ink in the ink storing chamber 32 does not leak through the ink flow port 132. Also, since the valve member 40 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 keeps a closed valve condition, the ink in the ink storing chamber 32 does not evaporate.

[0104] In the connected state, the slide shaft 41 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 in the ink cartridge 130 is pressed by the wall and retracted against the biasing force of the spring, so that the valve is opened. Consequently, the ink storing chamber 32 is communicated via the capillary 157 to the atmosphere. The valve member 20 of the ink injecting connection port 131 maintains a closed valve condition to prevent the leakage of the ink, and the entry of the atmosphere.

[0105] In this state, if the recording head 89 is sealed by the capping system and a negative pressure is applied to the recording head 89, the ink flow port 132 is subjected to a strong negative pressure to force the diaphragm valve 12 in the negative pressure generating system 33 to be opened. Consequently, the ink in the ink storing chamber 32 flows into the recording head 89, and the recording head 89 is filled with the ink.

[0106] If the ink is consumed by the recording head 89 to cause the negative pressure of the ink flow port 132 to be increased, the ink is supplied to the recording head 89 in the same way as in the previous examples.

[0107] That is, the diaphragm valve 61 receiving the ink pressure of the ink storing chamber 32 is separated from the protruded portion 64 against the biasing force of the spring 77, because the difference in pressure between the front and back sides of the diaphragm valve 61 is increased. Consequently, the through hole 65 of the diaphragm valve 61 is opened and the passage holes 69 and 72 are communicated with each other to permit the ink to flow into the ink flow port 132. If the ink flows into the recording head 89 and the negative pressure of the ink flow port 132 is decreased, the diaphragm valve 61 is pressed onto the protruded portion 64 by the action of the biasing force of the spring 77 so that the through hole 65 is sealed with the protruded portion 64. In this way, the diaphragm valve 61 is repeatedly contacted with and separated from the protruded portion 64

so as to keep the ink pressure of the ink flow port 132 at a constant negative pressure.

[0108] When ink in the ink cartridge 130 is consumed and refilling or replenishment of ink into the ink cartridge 130 is required, an ink refilling tool, such as a syringe 160, is inserted into the through hole 155 as shown in Fig. 25b so that a tip end of the syringe 160 presses the valve member 140 and the valve member 140 is put into an open valve condition. As shown in Fig. 25c, the tip end of the syringe 160 has a pressing portion 160a for pressing the valve member 140 and communication portions 160b for communicating an interior of the syringe 160 with the ink injecting connection port 131. Therefore, if the syringe 160 is inserted into the through hole 155 until the pressing portion 160a pushes the valve member 140 into the open valve condition, the interior of the syringe 160 is communicated via the ink injecting connection port 131 and the opening 142 with the interior of the ink storing chamber 32. If a piston 161 of the syringe 160 is pushed in this state, the ink in the syringe 160 is filled into the ink storage chamber 32 through the communication portions (openings) 160b, the ink injecting connection port 131 and the opening 142, while the air compressed within the ink storage chamber 32 in association with the refilling of the ink is discharged out of the ink storage chamber 32 via the atmosphere communicating connection port 34 and the capillary 157 to the atmosphere.

[0109] When the syringe 160 is removed after a predetermined quantity of ink is refilled into the ink storage chamber 32, the valve member 140 is moved by the biasing force of the spring 144 to establish the closed valve condition. Accordingly, it is possible to eliminate the ink leakage.

[0110] In addition, although ink is simply refilled in the above example, the following method may be applicable. That is, an empty syringe 160 is inserted into the recessed portion 155 to collect all of ink remaining in the ink storage chamber 32, and then a predetermined quantity of ink is refilled into the storage chamber 32 using the syringe 160. This method is advantageous in strictly managing the consumed ink amount associated with the printing quantity and accurately judging the remaining ink amount.

[0111] Figs. 26A, 26B and Fig. 27 illustrate a fifth example of the ink cartridge according to the invention, regarding the structure on the front and back sides. The ink cartridge 170 comprises a base member 175 having a recessed portion 172 opening on one face, and the guide portions 173, 174 protruding in parallel to this opening face upward and in an insertion direction, and a film 176 for sealing the recessed portion 172 to define an ink storing chamber 177 between the base member 175 and the film 176. The film 176 is deformable depending on the fluctuation of the ink pressure, and is made of a material having the air impermeable property and the adhesion property.

[0112] At a lower position when the cartridge 170 is

attached to the recording apparatus, there is provided an ink supply port 178 in which a valve mechanism is installed. An atmosphere communicating connection port 179 is formed at an upper position. A meandering narrow groove 180 is formed on the surface of the base member 175 defining a bottom of the recessed portion 172. One end 180a of the groove 180 is opened to a side face of the base member 175 and the other end 180b thereof is connected to a large diameter portion 181a of a recessed portion 181.

[0113] As shown in Fig. 26B, the recessed portion 181 is formed with a frame portion 181b having a slightly smaller diameter. An air permeable film 181c having ink repellent property is adhered to or welded to this frame portion 181b as a partition for the large diameter recessed portion 181a serving as an ink trap. The air permeable film 181c is made, for example, of a porous film of fluorine resin, and has desirably an ink repellent ability of 3000 to 5000Pa or more, which is higher than the ink holding force of the meniscus at the nozzle openings in the recording head.

[0114] The exposed face where the narrow groove 180 and the recessed portion 181 are formed is sealed with a film 182 having the air permeability and the adhesion property so that the narrow groove 180 forms the capillary and the recessed portion 181 constitutes the ink trap.

[0115] This recessed portion 181 is connected via a connecting recessed portion 184 to a communication chamber 183 formed in the vicinity of the atmosphere communicating connection port 179. The connecting recessed portion 184 and the communication chamber 183 are sized in cross section to secure such an interstice that ink does not reach at least the recessed portion 181 owing to a capillary force and desirably the ink is returned to the communication chamber 183 owing to a difference in water head from the liquid face of ink in the ink storing chamber 177 (the recessed portion 172) even if the ink flows into the recessed portion 181.

[0116] Fig. 28 illustrates a structure in cross section of the ink cartridge 170. The ink supply port 178 is formed with a tubular portion 186 having a spring receiving portion 185 shaped like a truncated cone at its center. A valve member 188 is movably fitted to the tubular portion 186, and the valve member 188 is urged toward the ink supply port by a coil spring 187 guided by the spring receiving portion 185 so as to be constantly contacted elastically with a packing 189. The packing 189 serving as a removal preventing member is fitted to the ink supply port side of the tubular portion 186. This tubular portion 186 has a passage hole 190 (see Fig. 27) communicating with the ink storing chamber 177 in a state where the valve member 188 is pressed onto the spring receiving portion 185.

[0117] As shown in Fig. 29A, the valve member 188 has a tubular portion 188a sliding on the inner face of the tubular portion 186, and a partition wall 188b formed in its central part. An operation lever of the recording

head side and the spring receiving portion 185 can be brought into contact with the partition wall 188b.

[0118] On the other hand, the atmosphere communicating connection port 179 is formed with a tubular portion 193 that communicates via an opening 191 (see Fig. 27) with the communication chamber 183 and that also communicates via a through hole 192 with an upper part of the ink storing chamber 177. A valve member 195 is fitted to the tubular portion 193, which is urged outward by a coil spring 194, and a packing 200 serving as a removal preventing member is fitted to the opening side of the tubular portion 193.

[0119] The valve member 195 is constructed by an operation rod 196 insertable into an opening 192, a pressure receiving member 197, and a seal member 198, as shown in Fig. 29B. The seal member is fitted around an annular groove portion 196b formed in a large diameter portion 196a of the operation rod 196, a small diameter portion 196c is passed through the opening 192 from the side of the ink storing chamber, a coil spring 194 is fitted around the small diameter portion 196c, and then the pressure receiving member 197 is secured at the tip end of the small diameter portion 196c.

[0120] If the inner diameter of the opening 192 is greater than the outer diameter of the large diameter portion 196, and smaller than the outer diameter of the seal member 198, the seal member 198 can be fitted to the operation rod 196 on the side of the ink chamber in a state where the operation rod 196 has been inserted into the opening 192, and the coil spring 194 can be inserted from the side of the atmosphere communicating connection port 179 and then the pressure receiving member 197 can be secured to the operation rod 196.

[0121] Figs. 30 and 31 illustrates a fifth example of a connection unit suitable for the ink cartridge 170. This connection unit 201 is designed to be connected to the ink cartridge 170 such that an upper space of an ink reserving chamber 202 is communicated with the atmosphere, and a lower part thereof receives ink to supply thus received ink through an ink flow port 203 on the bottom to the recording head.

[0122] And an ink inflow tube 204 having an ink inflow notch 204a at the leading end portion and an atmosphere communicating tube 205 having an atmosphere inflow notch 205a at the leading end portion are formed at the respective positions opposed to the ink supply port 178 of the ink cartridge, and the atmosphere communicating connection port 179 thereof. The ink inflow tube 204 and the atmosphere communicating tube 205 are in communication with the ink reserving chamber 202 via the through holes 206a, 206b of a case 206 constituting the connection unit 201. Valve members 207, 208 having the substantially same constitution as the valve member 195 as previously described are provided to the ink flow tube 204 and the atmosphere communicating tube 205, respectively.

[0123] In this example, to supply ink in the ink reserving chamber 202 into the recording head at a constant

negative pressure, a negative pressure chamber or negative pressure generating system is constructed in which a diaphragm valve or membrane valve 209 and a flow passage formation member 210 are incorporated in a recessed portion 211, and the outside of the recessed portion is sealed with a film 212 having high air impermeability. The negative pressure generating system in this example is substantially the same in construction as the negative pressure generating system of the former examples.

[0124] In this example, in a state in which the ink cartridge 170 is not attached to the recording apparatus, the passage hole 190 of the ink supply port 178 and the opening 192 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 179 are sealed by the valve members 188 and 195, respectively, so that the ink storing chamber 177 is isolated from the atmosphere. The connection unit 201 is also sealed by the valve members 207, 208 (Fig. 31 and Fig. 34A).

[0125] During the course of attachment of the ink cartridge 170 to the connection unit 201, the ink inflow tube 204 and the atmosphere communicating tube 205 are fitted to and relatively moved with respect to the packing 189 of the ink supply port 178 and the packing 200 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 179, so that the leading ends of the ink inflow tube 204 and the atmosphere communicating tube 205 presses and moves the partition wall 188b of the valve member 188 and the pressure receiving member 197 of the valve member 196 to the predefined positions, regardless of the resiliency of the springs 187, 194 and the fixing caused by the solidified ink. (See Figs. 32, 33a and 33b.)

[0126] Consequently, the passage hole 190 in communication with the ink storing chamber 177 is opened, and the seal member 198 is separated from the opening 192, so that the tubular portion 193 and the ink storing chamber 197 are communicated via the recessed portion 181 and the narrow groove 180 with the atmosphere.

[0127] The relative positions or relative dimensions of the atmosphere communicating tube 205, the atmosphere communicating port 179, the ink inflow tube 204 and the ink supply port 178 are set such that a position where the atmosphere communicating tube 205 is jointed to the atmosphere communicating connection port 179, namely a timing at which the valve is open when the tube 205 is jointed to the port 179, is prior to a timing at which the valve member 188 is opened by the ink supply port 178 and the ink inflow tube 204. This makes it possible to prevent the leakage of the ink that may occur when the ink cartridge 170 is attached.

[0128] That is, in the case where the air in the ink storing chamber 177 is expanded to raise the pressure above the atmospheric pressure, the valve member 196 of the atmosphere communicating connection port 179 is opened in a state where the valve member 188 of the ink supply port 178 is kept in a closed valve condition, thereby causing the air in the ink storing chamber 177

to escape out of the ink storing chamber 177. Since the ink is maintained at an atmospheric pressure when the ink supply port 178 is opened subsequently, the ink is prevented from leaking out of the ink supply port 178.

[0129] In this state, since each of the valve members 207, 208 of the connection unit 201 is opened, the ink in the ink storing chamber 177 can be supplied by the connection unit 201 through the ink flow port 203 to the recording head, as shown in Fig. 34B. In this state, the ink storing chamber 177 of the ink cartridge 170 and the ink reserving chamber 202 of the connection unit 201 are in communication with the atmosphere via the capillary formed by the narrow groove 180 and the film 182. Accordingly, ink required by the recording head 89 can be supplied thereto securely, and the vapor of the ink solvent in these chambers 177, 202 can be prevented from being dispersed to the atmosphere.

[0130] If the attitude of the cartridge 170 is subjected to a great change by the movement of the recording apparatus, ink may reach the upper opening 192 and leaks out of the opening 192 to the communication chamber 183. This ink flows through the recessed portion 184 and is trapped in a wide space of the recessed portion 181. Further, since the recessed portion 181 is divided by the air permeable film 181c, the ink is prevented from flowing into the groove 180, and leaking outside the cartridge 170, even if the recording apparatus is turned upside down at the time of movement or storage.

[0131] Further, if the air permeable film 181c is provided with the ink repellant ability higher than the ink holding power of the meniscus at the nozzle openings in the recording head 89, the ink may leak out from the recording head but cannot leak out from the cartridge 170 even in the case where the ink storing chamber 177 has an increased pressure caused by the expanded air in the ink storing chamber 177.

[0132] Even if the ink flows out from the nozzle openings of the recording head, the recording apparatus is polluted by the ink, because, in general, the nozzle openings are sealed with a cap for preventing the clogging of the nozzle openings.

[0133] The ink having flowed into the recessed portion 181 is returned, through the recessed portion 184 where the interstice is too large to exhibit the capillary force, to the communication chamber 183 by gravity, and then through the opening 192 to the ink storing chamber 177, after the ink cartridge 170 is restored to its original normal attitude.

[0134] As the ink is consumed by the recording head, the ink is collected in a small chamber 177a formed as a recessed portion on the bottom of the ink storing chamber 177. Consequently, the ink level is maintained above the passage hole 190, so that the ink can be supplied to the recording head 89 substantially to the last.

[0135] In the case where the ink cartridge 170 is replaced to change the printing medium or the like, the ink cartridge 170 is removed from the connection unit 201, so that the ink inflow tube 204 and the atmosphere com-

municating tube 205 is pulled off. As a result, the valve members 188 and 195 of the ink supply port 178 and the atmosphere communicating connection port 179 are pushed back by the springs 187, 204 to seal the passage hole 190 and the opening 192 communicated with the ink storing chamber 177. Consequently, the ink or the ink solvent in the ink storing chamber 177 can be prevented from leaking or evaporating.

[0136] In the above example, the ink cartridge is attached to the recording head by the connection unit 201 having the negative pressure generating system. However, it will be apparent that the ink cartridge may be connected without interposing the differential pressure valve mechanism constituting the negative pressure generating system, when the ink holding force at the meniscus of the nozzle openings in the recording head is fully high.

[0137] Fig. 35 illustrates a sixth example of the connection unit. The connection unit 201 comprises an ink reserving chamber 202 extending vertically on one side, an atmosphere communicating connection port 205 and an ink inflow connection port 204, each in the form of a tubular member to be connected to an external system, which are respectively formed on an upper part and a lower part of the ink reserving chamber 202, and an ink flow port 203 communicating with the recording head 89 at the bottom.

[0138] Each of the connection ports 204, 205 has a communication window 204a, 205a on its peripheral face, and accommodates an axially movable valve member 207, 208 therein. Each of the valve members 207, 208 is accommodated such that one end 220a, 230a of a slide shaft 220, 230 projects from the connection port 204, 205.

[0139] Each of the valve members 207, 208 is provided with a packing 222, 232, which is fitted to the other end of the slide shaft 220, 230 and made of a resilient material, for sealing an in storing chamber side opening 204b, 205b communicated with the connection port 204, 205. As mentioned above, the valve member 207, 208 is inserted into the connection port 204, 205 in such a manner that the packing 222, 232 is elastically contacted with the opening 204b, 205b by the action of a spring.

[0140] The details of the valve mechanisms using the valve members 207, 208 will be described below by taking the ink inflow end connection 204 as an example. In addition, the construction of the valve mechanism described below can be applied to the former examples.

[0141] The connection port 204 in the form of a tubular member has the window 204a of a substantially rectangular opening having the length L1 and the width W1 and extending in a direction of central line as shown in Fig. 35B. The valve member 207 includes the slide shaft 220 that is sufficiently narrow in diameter so as not to hinder ink flow but have rigidity to withstand the movement thereof, and sealing portions 223, each arcuate in cross section, and having the length L2 and the width W2 to seal the window 204a. The sealing portions 223

are secured to ribs 224 serving as a spring seat to be located in regions opposed to the windows 204a when the valve member 207 is urged by a spring.

[0142] On the stop position side (left side in the figure) of the sealing portion 223 in the urged state, a removal preventing portion 223a is formed to be movably engaged with the window 204a of the ink inflow connection port 204. In the drawings, reference numeral 225, 235 denotes a fixture having a through hole 225a, 235a, into which the slide shaft 220, 230 is inserted, for movably supporting one end 220a, 230a of the slide shaft 220, 230.

[0143] If the ink cartridge 170 having the structure as shown in Fig. 28 is attached to the connection unit 201 thus constituted, the slide shaft 220, 230 of the connection unit 201 is pressed and moved against the biasing force of the spring, so that the packing 222, 232 is moved to the side of the ink reserving chamber 202 to open the opening 204b, 205b. Similarly the valve member 188, 196 of the ink cartridge 170 (see Fig. 32) is also opened. Consequently, the ink in the ink cartridge flows into the connection unit 201 to allow the ink to be supplied to the recording head, as previously described.

[0144] If the ink cartridge 170 is removed from the connection unit 201 because the ink in the ink cartridge 170 is consumed completely, or because of the replacement of the ink, the slide shafts 220, 230 of the connection unit 201 and the valve members 188, 196 of the ink cartridge 170 are released from their supports, so that the valves are closed by the biasing force of the springs.

[0145] Consequently, the atmosphere communicating connection port 205 and the ink inflow connection port 204 of the connection unit 201 are closed to prevent evaporation of the ink solvent from the atmosphere communicating connection port 205, and the ink leakage from the ink inflow connection port 204.

[0146] In a state where the ink cartridge 170 is pulled out, the ink inflow connection port 204 of the connection unit 201 is exposed to the atmosphere, so that the solvent of ink K adhering to the window 204a evaporates, and the ink is solidified, as shown in Fig. 36A. In this state, if the ink cartridge 170 is attached again, the slide shaft 220, 230 of the connection unit 201 and the ink cartridge 170 are pushed back in a direction of the arrow A, and in this process the removal preventing portion 223a is moved along the window 204a to clean up the ink solidified on the window 204a, as shown in Fig. 36B.

[0147] Consequently, in a state where the ink cartridge 170 is attached, the window 204a is opened normally, so that the ink flows from the ink cartridge 170 into the connection unit 201.

[0148] Fig. 37 illustrates in detail the flow of the ink from the ink cartridge 170 to the connection unit 201. If the ink in the ink cartridge 170 (Fig. 37I) is consumed, and the ink level drops to a narrow portion 202a formed in the ink reserving chamber 202 of the connection unit 201 (Fig. 37II), the ink level of the ink reserving chamber 202 is maintained at the narrow portion 202a owing to

a capillary force of the narrow portion 202a.

[0149] On the other hand, if the diaphragm valve 61 is opened in accordance with a negative pressure produced by the ink consumption by the recording head, the negative pressure acts on the ink cartridge 170 so that the ink within the ink cartridge 170 flows into the recording head via the negative pressure generating system 33.

[0150] The ink of the ink cartridge 170 is supplied to the recording head (Fig. 37III), while the ink level of the ink reserving chamber 202 is maintained at a level H above the filter 66, desirably, the passage hole 67. All ink in the ink cartridge 170 is supplied to the recording head without causing an ink exhaustion within the connection unit which is difficult to replace (Fig. 37IV).

[0151] In the above example, the lowest ink level H of the ink reserving chamber 202 is maintained by a capillary force of the narrow portion. However, if a floating member 240 having a circular section is inserted into an upper part of the ink reserving chamber 202, as shown in Figs. 38I to 38IV, the ink can be held at a predetermined level without depending on the capillary force of the narrow portion 202a.

[0152] That is, in a state where there is a predetermined amount of ink, as shown in Fig. 38I, the floating member 240 is located above the narrow portion 202a, whereby the ink can be expelled without hindrance. If the ink level drops to the level H, the floating member 240 is prevented from falling by the narrow portion 202a, so that a capillary force is exhibited. Consequently, the ink level of the ink reserving chamber 202 can be maintained at the level H independently of the decrease in the ink of the ink cartridge (Figs. 38II and 38III), in the same way as previously described. All ink in the ink cartridge 170 is supplied into the recording head while this state is kept (Fig. 38IV).

[0153] In the above example, the ink cartridge 170 is directly attached to the connection unit 201. However, a level sensor 241 may be provided in the connection unit 201 at a height at which the level of the ink reserving chamber 202 should be maintained, and the connection unit 201 may be connected to an ink flow port 245 of an ink storage member 244 such as an ink bag by a tube 243 via a liquid feeding pump 242 that is controlled by the level sensor 241 as shown in Fig. 39. This modification also provides the similar effect. In this case, it is desirable that an atmosphere communicating opening 246 is formed at an upper part of the ink reserving chamber 202, and sealed with a membrane 247 having the ink repellant property and the air permeability.

[0154] Fig. 40 illustrates one example of an ink jet recording apparatus to which the ink cartridge 170 and the connection unit 201 are applied, wherein a case main body 251 for accommodating a printing mechanism and a cartridge replacement mechanism has a lid 252 on the upper face which can be opened or closed, and a window 253 for insertion and extraction of the cartridge and a lever 254 for pushing out the cartridge are provided at

easily accessible one side portion of a front face 251a. A cut sheet holder 255 is provided on the back face of the case main body 251, and a paper delivery tray 256 is provided on a lower side of the front face.

[0155] Fig. 41 illustrates one example of the cartridge replacement mechanism. A lever 254 is pivotably supported by a rotational fulcrum 257. The lever 254 extends to the back face of a carriage 260 which is reciprocally movable while being guided by a guide shaft 258 and on which a recording head 259 is provided. Fixed to the leading end (the back side end) of the lever 254 is an arm 261 extending parallel to the guide shaft 258. The recording head 259 is connected to the connection units 201 shown in Fig. 30, and supplied with the ink from the cartridges 170 via the respective connection units 201. In this example, the common recording head 259 is provided for the connection units 201, but a plurality of recording heads may be provided for the connection units 201, respectively. The arm 261 is provided with a pressing piece 263 in the form of a roller having such a width as to contact an aimed ink cartridge 170 but not to contact an adjacent cartridge 170. The pressing piece 263 is located at a position opposed to the window 253 for insertion and extraction.

[0156] With such constitution, if the lever 254 is pressed down (in a direction of the arrow B in the figure), as shown in Fig. 41C, the pressing piece 263 is moved toward the front face and shifts a selected one of the cartridges 170, which is opposed to the window 253, toward the front face (arrow C in the figure). Consequently, the selected cartridge 170 is disengaged from the recording head 89, and can be taken out through the window 253.

[0157] Since the pressing piece 263 is made up of the roller that can rotate, it is possible to prevent an unnecessary external force caused by the rotation of the lever 254, i.e. a vertical force unnecessary to extract the ink cartridge, from being exerted on the cartridge 170 and the carriage 260.

[0158] If the pressure on the lever 254 is released, the lever 254 is moved upward by a biasing member 264, so that the pressing piece 263 is retracted to its original position (Fig. 41B).

[0159] Figs. 42A and 42B illustrate one example of an ink cartridge that is suitable for the recording apparatus. The ink cartridge is fundamentally constituted in the same way as the ink cartridge 170, except that a grip portion 175a is formed at the other end side, in addition to a guide portion 173 on the rear side, in consideration of the operability for insertion and extraction.

[0160] In this example, if the ink cartridge 170' is specified on a panel 270 at a stage where the ink of the ink cartridge 170' is consumed, the carriage 260 is moved to a position at which the specified ink cartridge 170' is opposed to the cartridge insertion and extraction window 253 of the case main body 251.

[0161] In this state, if the lever 254 is pressed down, the pressing piece 263 is moved toward the front face

to press the guide portion 173 projecting on the rear side of the connection unit 201. Consequently, the atmosphere communicating hole 179 and the ink supply port 178 of the ink cartridge 170' are disengaged from the connection unit 201. In this state, if the cartridge 170' is pulled out by holding the grip portion 175a with a finger, the cartridge 170 can be extracted from the connection unit 201. Since all the valve members 188, 196, 207, and 208 are in the closed valve condition, it is possible to prevent the ink of the ink cartridge 170 from leaking through the ink supply port 178 and the ink solvent of the connection unit 201 from evaporating, in extracting the ink cartridge.

[0162] In this state, if a new ink cartridge 170 is pushed through the window 253 rearward, the atmosphere communicating hole 179 and the ink supply port 178 of the ink cartridge 170 are fitted to the tubular atmosphere communicating port 205 and the ink supply port 204 of the connection unit 201. Consequently, the valve members 198, 188, 208, 207 of the openings or ports 179, 178, 205, 204 are retracted mutually and opened, so that an upper section of the ink storing chamber 177 in the ink cartridge and an upper section of the ink chamber 202 in the connection unit 201 are opened via the capillary narrow groove 180 to the atmosphere, and the ink in the ink cartridge 170 flows into the connection unit 201.

[0163] In this example, the ink cartridge can be inserted or extracted by moving the cartridge horizontally, but if the cartridge is moved in a direction nonparallel to the movement direction of the carriage, for example, in a vertical direction, the carriage can be prevented from moving upon the insertion or extraction operation. Accordingly, the inserting or extracting direction can be appropriately selected depending on the case structure or the like.

[0164] In the above example, the window 253 for inserting or extracting the cartridge is formed on the case main body. However, the lid 252 may be formed with the window 253 to exhibit the same effect because the lid is unnecessary to open in replacing the ink cartridge.

[0165] Further, in the above example, the cartridge is inserted or extracted by the manual operation, but an electromagnetic driving system such as an electromagnetic solenoid may be used to exhibit the same effect.

Claims

1. An ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, comprising:

a flexible ink bag storing ink therein and having an ink flow port;
a case member storing the ink bag therein;
an ink supply port which supplies ink in the ink bag to a recording head; and
a negative pressure generating system which

is provided between the ink flow port and the ink supply port, and which maintains pressure of the ink supply port to be lower by a specified valve than pressure in the ink bag.

2. The ink cartridge according to claim 1, wherein the negative pressure generating system includes a differential pressure valve mechanism having a diaphragm valve.

3. The ink cartridge according to claim 1, wherein the ink bag is deformable depending on an amount of ink remaining in the ink bag.

4. An ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, comprising:

an ink storing chamber;
an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and closed automatically when the ink cartridge is detached from a recording apparatus;
an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and closed automatically when the ink cartridge is detached from the recording apparatus; and
a negative pressure generating system which supplies ink to the ink supplying connection port while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure state.

5. The ink cartridge according to claim 4, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port is communicated via a capillary formed on a recording apparatus side to the atmosphere when the ink cartridge is attached to the recording apparatus.

6. The ink cartridge according to claim 4, wherein each of the atmosphere communicating connection port and the ink supplying connection port has a valve member which closes corresponding one of the ports using a biasing spring when the ink cartridge is detached from the recording apparatus, and opens the corresponding one of the ports when the ink cartridge is attached to the recording apparatus.

7. The ink cartridge according to claim 4, wherein said ink storing chamber is defined by a recessed portion of a base member and an air impermeable film that seals an open end of the recessed portion and that is deformable to receive pressure variation of ink.

8. The ink cartridge according to claim 4, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port is opened before the ink supplying connection port is opened during a course of attachment of the ink cartridge to the recording apparatus.

9. An ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, comprising:

an ink storing chamber;
an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and closed automatically when the ink cartridge is detached from the recording apparatus; and
an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and closed automatically when the ink cartridge is detached from the recording head, wherein ink is supplied from the ink cartridge to a recording head via a connection unit that has a negative pressure generating system and that is provided to the recording apparatus.

10. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, wherein the ink storing chamber is defined by a recessed portion of a base member, and a film that seals an open end of the recessed portion, and that is deformable to receive pressure variation of ink.

11. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port is opened before the ink supplying connection port is opened during a course of attachment of the ink cartridge to said recording apparatus.

12. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port is communicated via a capillary to the atmosphere, the capillary being defined by a narrow groove on a surface of a casing member of the cartridge, and a film sealing the narrow groove.

13. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, further comprising:
a flow passage that has such an interstice not to guide ink to a capillary by a capillary force is formed in a region on an upper face of the ink cartridge, and that communicates the atmosphere communicating connection port with the capillary.

14. The ink cartridge according to claim 13, wherein an ink trap is provided between the flow passage and the capillary.

15. The ink cartridge according to claim 12, further comprising:

a recessed portion to which an end portion of the capillary is connected;
an ink repellent and air permeable film sealing the recessed portion to define an ink trap.

16. The ink cartridge according to claim 15, wherein the ink repellent film has an ink repellent ability higher

than an ink holding force of meniscus at a nozzle opening of the recording head.

17. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, further comprising:

a recessed portion that is communicated with the ink supplying connection port, and that is located in a lower part of the ink cartridge when attached to the recording apparatus.

18. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, wherein the ink supplying connection port includes:

a tubular portion having a truncated conical spring seat in a central part thereof;
a coiled spring guided by the spring seat; and
a cylindrical valve member having a partition wall urged by the spring.

19. The ink cartridge according to claim 9, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port includes:

a tubular portion that has a through hole communicated with a capillary, and that has an opening opened to the ink storing chamber; and
a valve member urged by a coil spring to close the opening.

20. A connection unit for an ink jet recording apparatus, adapted to connect an ink cartridge to a recording head, the ink cartridge comprising an ink storing chamber, an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition in a first state in which the ink cartridge is not attached to the connection unit, and an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition in the first state, the connection unit comprising:

an ink reserving chamber extending vertically;
a negative pressure generating system;
an atmosphere communicating connection port provided to an upper part of the ink reserving chamber and to be connected to the atmosphere communicating connection port of the ink cartridge;
an ink inflow connection port provided to a lower part of the ink reserving chamber and to be connected to the ink supplying connection port of the ink cartridge; and
an ink flow port for supplying ink in the ink reserving chamber to the recording head;
wherein the connection ports are respectively provided with valve members which maintain a closed condition normally and which establish an open condition when the ink cartridge is at-

tached to the connection unit.

21. The connection unit according to claim 20, wherein the ink reserving chamber is formed with a narrow portion for holding ink under the action of a capillary force.

22. The connection unit apparatus according to claim 21, wherein the negative pressure generating system is protruded to a region where a minimal ink level in the ink reserving chamber is to be maintained, thereby defining the narrow portion in the region.

23. The connection unit according to claim 20, wherein a narrow portion, which can retain a floating member, is formed in a region where a minimal ink level in the ink reserving chamber is to be maintained, and the minimal ink level in the ink reserving chamber is maintained by a capillary force produced cooperatively by the narrow portion and the floating member retained by the narrow portion.

24. The connection unit according to claim 20, wherein the negative pressure generating system comprises a differential pressure valve that includes a valve chamber communicated with the ink reserving chamber and a diaphragm valve accommodated in the valve chamber, and that is open when ink pressure in the ink flow port is less than a specified pressure.

25. The connection unit according to claim 20, further comprising:

a filter disposed at an upstream side with respect to the negative pressure generating system.

26. The connection unit according to claim 20, wherein the ink inflow connection port includes:

a tubular member extending in a direction of inserting and extracting the cartridge, and having a peripheral face;
an ink inflow window provided to the peripheral face of the tubular member; and
the valve member which is biased to normally maintain the closed condition for the ink inflow connection port, and which has a removal preventing portion that is guided by and moved along the window when the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

27. The connection unit according to claim 20, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port includes:

a tubular member extending in a direction of inserting and extracting the cartridge, and having

a peripheral face;
 an ink inflow window provided to the peripheral face of the tubular member; and
 the valve member which is biased to normally maintain the closed condition for the atmosphere communicating connection port of the connection unit, and which has a removal preventing portion that is guided by and moved along the window when the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

28. An ink jet recording apparatus comprising an ink cartridge and the connection unit, the ink cartridge including:

an ink storing chamber;
 an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition when the ink cartridge is not attached to the connection unit;
 an ink injecting connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition normally;
 an ink flow port communicated with the ink storing chamber for supplying ink to a recording head; and
 a negative pressure generating system which is provided between the ink storing chamber and the ink flow port, and which supplies the ink to the ink flow port while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure; and the connection unit including:
 a connection port which establishes an open condition for the atmosphere communicating connection port to communicate the ink storing chamber via the atmosphere communicating connection port and a capillary with the atmosphere when the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit; and
 an ink injecting connection portion which accommodates the ink injecting connection port therein while maintaining the closed condition for the ink injecting connection port, and which establishes an open condition for the ink injecting connection port if an ink injecting system is inserted into the ink injecting connection portion from an exterior.

29. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim 28, wherein the atmosphere communicating connection port includes a valve member which establishes the open condition for the atmosphere communicating connection port when the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit, and which is biased by a spring to maintain the closed condition for the atmosphere communicating connection port when the ink cartridge is not attached to the con-

nection unit.

30. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim 28, wherein the ink storing chamber is defined by a recessed portion of a base member, and a film which seals an open end of the recessed portion, and which is deformable to receive pressure variation of ink pressure.

31. An ink jet recording apparatus comprising an ink cartridge, a connection unit, an ink jet recording head and a capping system, the ink cartridge including:

an ink storing chamber;
 an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition when the ink cartridge is not attached to the connection unit; and
 an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber for supplying ink to the recording head; and
 a negative pressure generating system which is provided between the ink storing chamber and the ink supplying connection port and which supplies the ink to the ink supplying connection port while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure;

the connection unit including:

a first connection portion which establishes an open condition for the atmosphere communicating connection port to communicate the ink storing chamber via the first connection port and a capillary with the atmosphere; and
 a second connection portion which establishes an open condition for the ink supplying connection port to supply the ink to the recording head;

the ink jet recording head which receives the ink supplied via the connection unit and which includes:

nozzle openings for ejecting ink droplets; and
 an atmosphere open hole communicated with an end of the capillary, and opened to the atmosphere at a face where the nozzle openings are formed; and
 a capping system which selectively establishes a first state in which the nozzle openings and the atmosphere open hole are hermetically sealed, and a second state in which the nozzle openings are communicated with a suction system.

32. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim

31, wherein said capping system has a first region for sealing the nozzle openings while communicating the nozzle openings to the suction system, and a second region for sealing the atmosphere open hole, and the first region is separately provided from the second region

33. An ink jet recording apparatus comprising:

a recording system including a carriage adapted to detachably mount an ink cartridge thereto, and an ink jet recording head provided to a carriage;
a case including a lid and a case main body, and housing the recording system;
a window formed in the case, through which the ink cartridge is insertable and extractable; and
a pressing system which is operable from an exterior, and

which moves the ink cartridge mounted to the carriage toward the window.

34. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim 33, wherein the ink cartridge includes:

an ink supplying connection port having a valve system which normally maintains a closed condition, and which establishes an open condition when the ink cartridge is mounted to the carriage; and
a grip portion provided at a position closer to the window.

35. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim 33, further comprising:

a connection unit connected to the recording head, wherein the ink cartridge is insertable into or extractable from said connection unit.

36. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim 33, wherein said pressing system includes:

a pivotable lever operable externally; and
a roller rotatably supported to the lever and movable toward the window side.

37. The ink jet recording apparatus according to claim 33, wherein the ink cartridge comprises:

an ink storing chamber;
an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintaining a closed condition when the ink cartridge is not attached to the recording apparatus; and
an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and maintain-

ing a closed condition when the ink cartridge is not attached to the recording apparatus, and

the connection unit comprises:

an ink reserving chamber;
a negative pressure generating system;
an atmosphere communicating connection portion provided to the ink reserving chamber, and to be connected to the atmosphere communicating connection port of the ink cartridge;
an ink inflow connection portion provided to the ink reserving chamber, and to be connected to the ink supplying connection port of the ink cartridge;
an ink flow port which supplies ink in the ink reserving chamber to the recording head;
valve members which are respectively provided to the connection portions to maintain a closed condition normally, and establish an open condition when the ink cartridge is attached to the recording head.

38. A ink bag comprising:

a flexible ink bag portion storing ink therein; and
a differential pressure valve mechanism including:

a valve seat formation member that is attached to the flexible ink bag portion and that has an ink flow port and a valve seat; and
an elastic membrane valve that is attached to the valve seat formation member and that has an ink flow port aligned with the valve seat.

39. The ink bag according to claim 38, further comprising:

an ink induction passage formation portion fixed with respect to the valve seat formation member.

40. The ink bag according to claim 39, further comprising:

an ink supply port fixed with respect to the valve seat formation member.

41. The ink bag according to claim 39, wherein the valve seat and the membrane valve define a first space therebetween, and the membrane valve and the ink induction passage formation portion define a second space therebetween, and ink in the flexible ink bag portion flows via the ink flow port of the valve seat formation member, the first space, the ink flow port of the membrane valve, and the second space to a recording head when the ink flow port of

the membrane valve is separated from the valve seat.

42. An ink supplying system for supplying ink to a recording head, comprising:

an ink cartridge having an ink storing chamber storing ink therein;
a connection unit, to which the ink cartridge is detachably attached, for supplying the ink in the ink storing chamber to the recording head;
a differential pressure valve mechanism including a valve seat and an elastic membrane valve having an ink flow port aligned with the valve seat;
a capillary groove communicating the ink storing chamber with the atmosphere,
wherein at least one of the differential pressure valve mechanism and the capillary groove is provided to the connection unit.

43. The ink supplying unit according to claim 42, wherein the connection unit has an ink reserving chamber storing the ink supplied from the ink storing chamber.

44. The ink supplying unit according to claim 42, wherein the ink cartridge has a first arcuate exterior surface analogous in shape to the circular membrane valve, the connection unit has a second arcuate exterior surface conformed in shape to the first arcuate exterior surface, and the first and second arcuate exterior surfaces are fitted to each other when the cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

45. The ink supplying system according to claim 42, wherein a plane along which the capillary groove is formed is substantially parallel to the membrane valve, and extends vertically.

46. The ink supplying system according to claim 42, wherein the differential pressure valve mechanism further includes a spring biasing the membrane valve to the valve seat.

47. An ink supplying system for supplying ink to a recording head to eject ink droplets from nozzle openings formed in a nozzle plate, the system comprising:

an ink storing chamber storing ink therein;
a negative pressure generating system for supplying ink in the ink storing chamber to the recording head while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure;
a capillary groove communicated with the ink storing chamber, the capillary groove having an open end formed in the nozzle plate.

48. The ink supplying system according to claim 47, further comprising:

a connection unit having the capillary groove, and supporting the recording head;
an ink cartridge having the ink storing chamber, and detachably attached to the connection unit, a valve system for communicating the capillary groove with the ink storing chamber when the ink cartridge is attached to the connection unit.

49. The ink supplying system according to claim 47, wherein the negative pressure generating system includes a valve seat and an elastic membrane valve having an ink flow port aligned with the valve seat.

50. The ink supplying system according to claim 49, wherein the negative pressure generating system further includes a spring biasing the membrane valve to the valve seat.

51. An ink supplying system for supplying ink to a recording head, the system comprising:

a recessed portion;
an air permeable film having an ink repellent property, and partitioning the recessed portion into first and second chambers;
an ink storing chamber communicated with the first chamber; and
a capillary groove communicating the second chamber with the atmosphere.

52. The ink supplying system according to claim 51, further comprising:

a negative pressure generating system for supplying ink in the ink storing chamber to the recording head while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure.

53. An ink cartridge for an ink jet recording apparatus, comprising:

an ink storing chamber;
an atmosphere communicating connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber, and closed automatically when the ink cartridge is detached from a recording apparatus;
an ink supplying connection port communicated with the ink storing chamber; and
a negative pressure generating system which supplies ink to the ink supplying connection port while maintaining a predetermined negative pressure state.

54. The ink cartridge according to claim 52, further comprising:

a cap sealing the ink supplying connection port when the ink cartridge is detached from the recording apparatus.

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FIG. 1

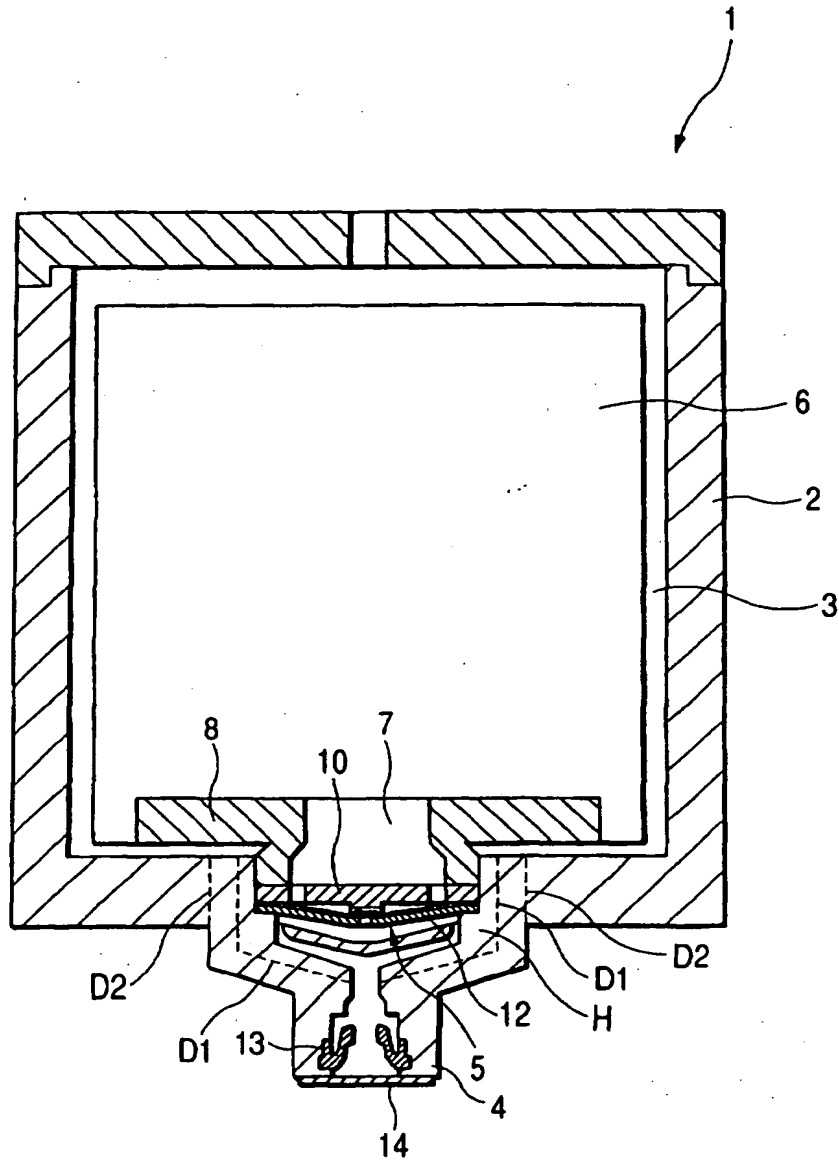


FIG. 2A

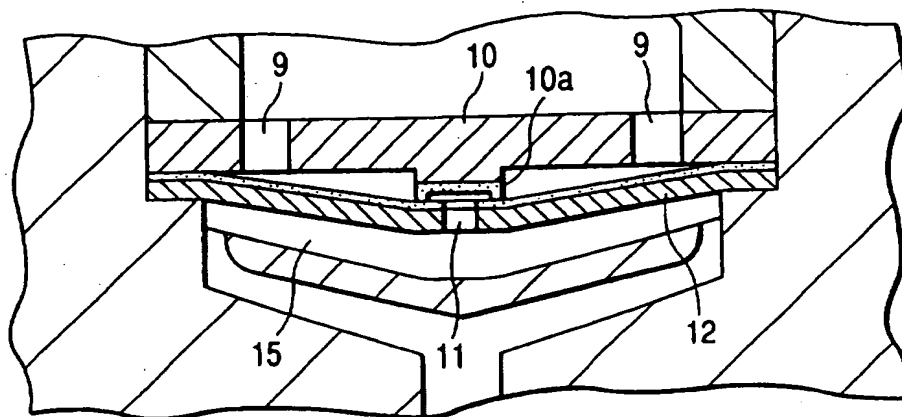


FIG. 2B

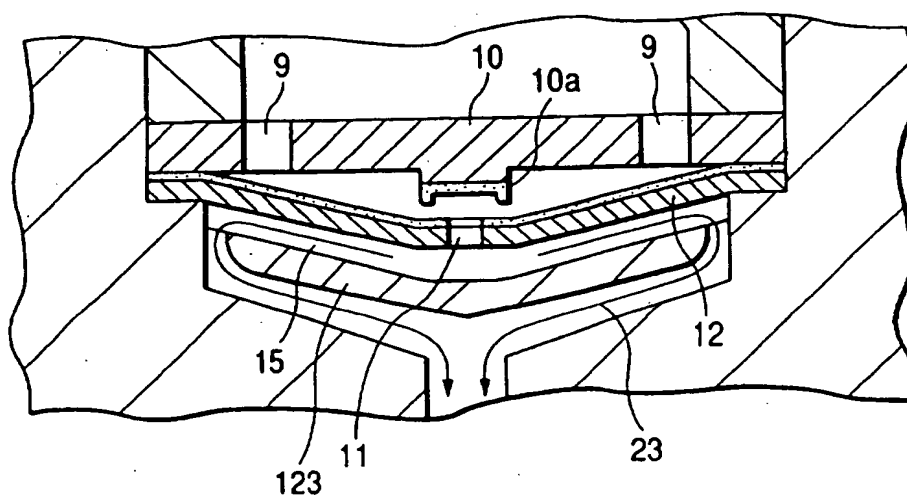


FIG. 3

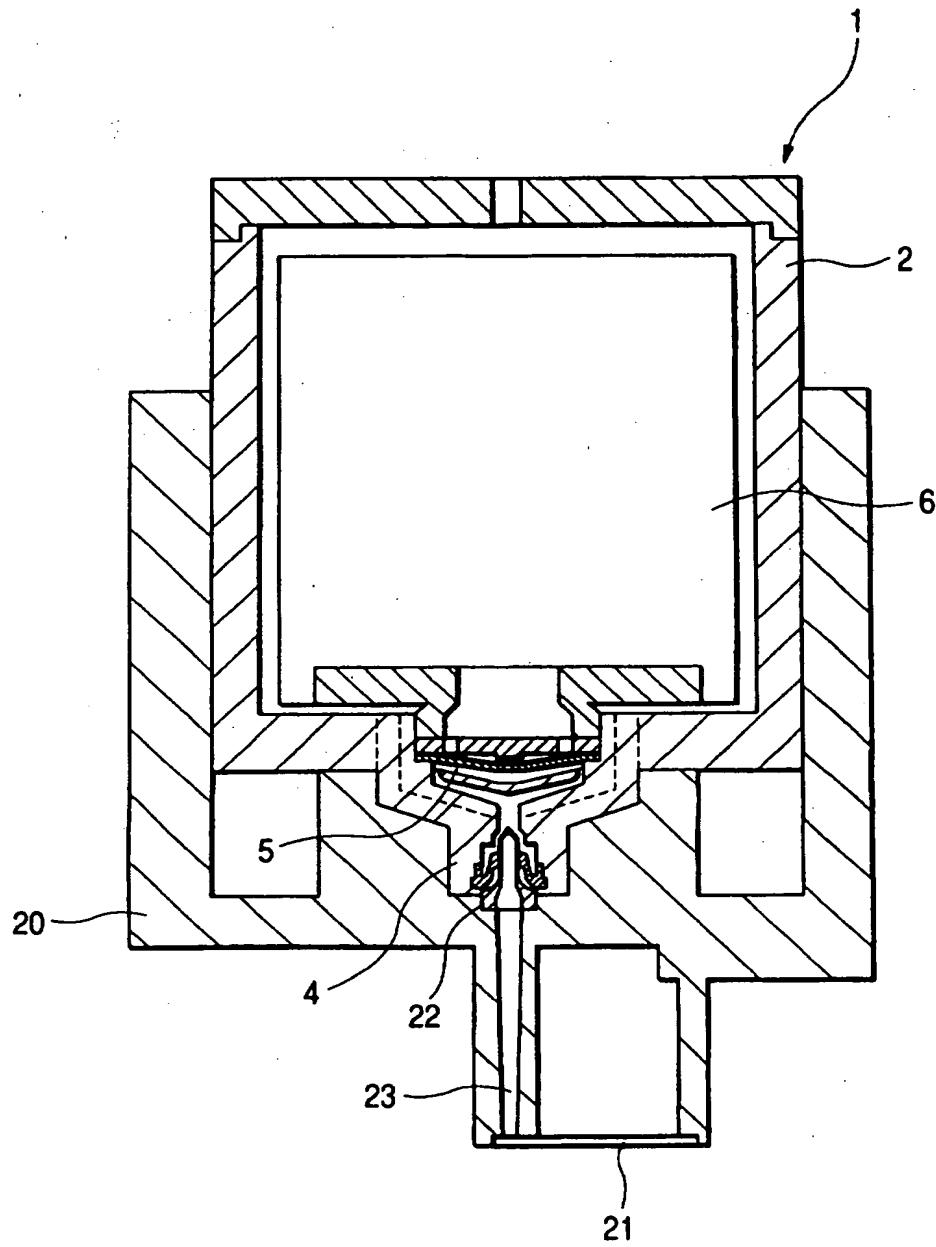


FIG. 4

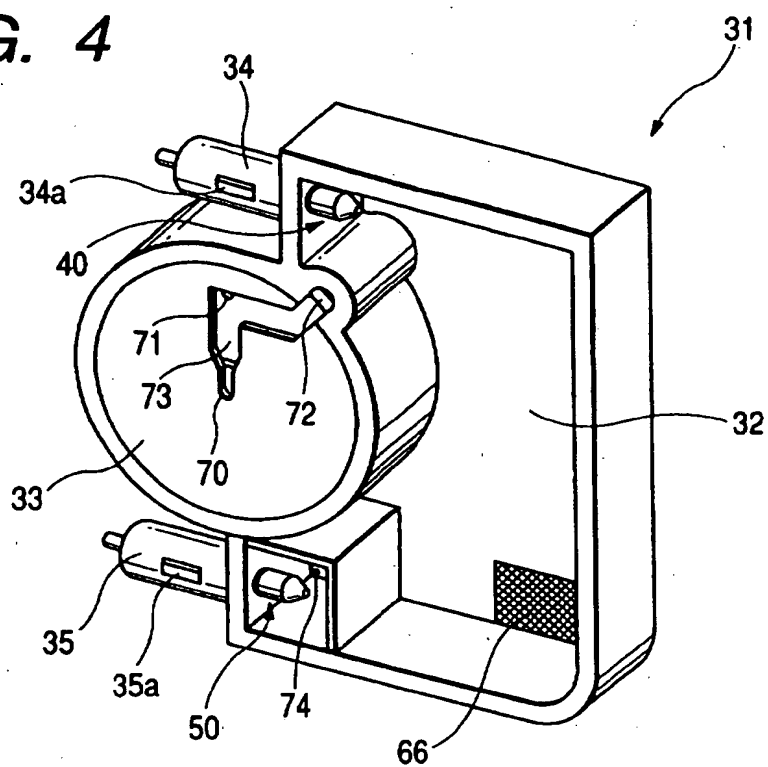


FIG. 5

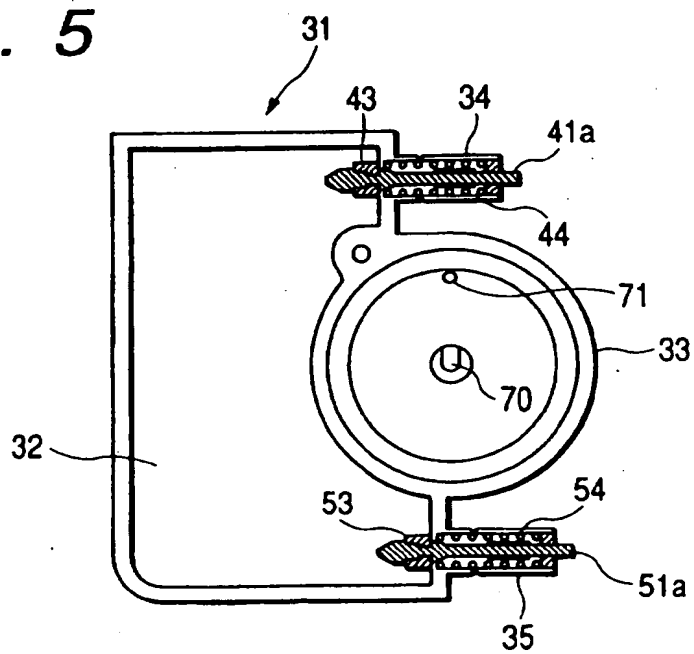


FIG. 6

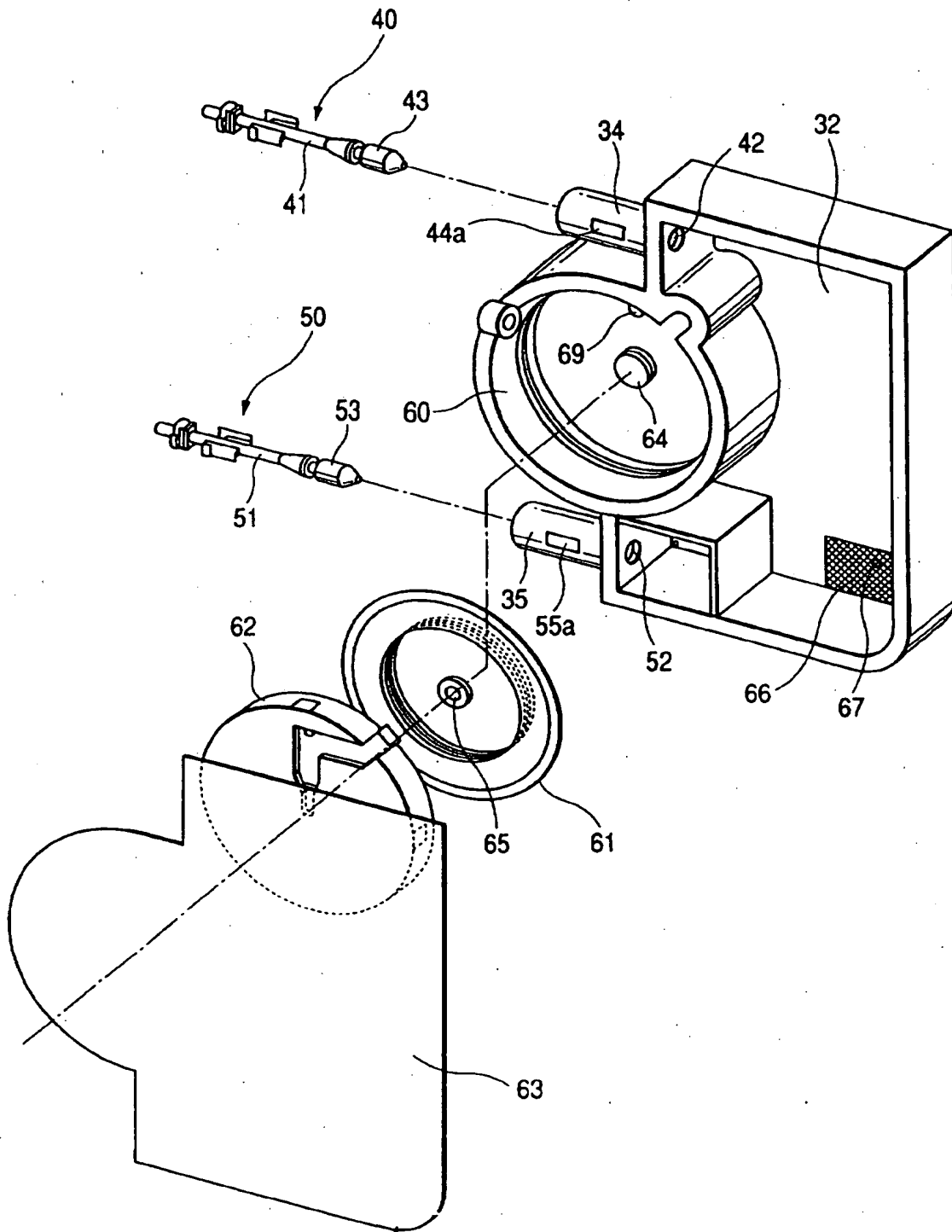


FIG. 7A

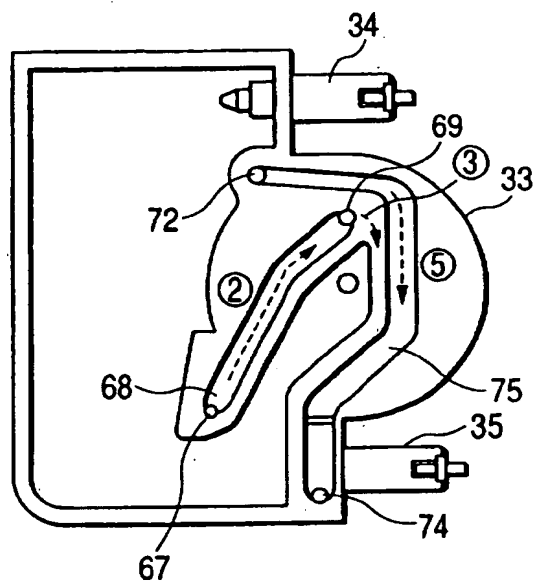


FIG. 7B

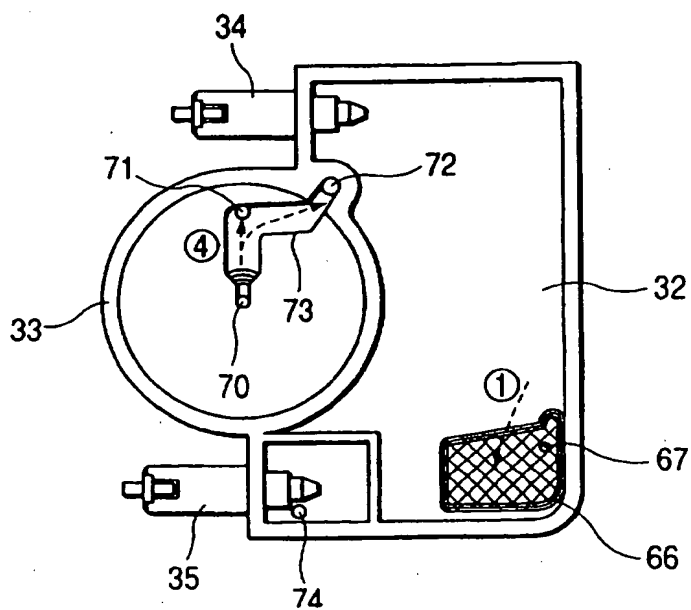


FIG. 8

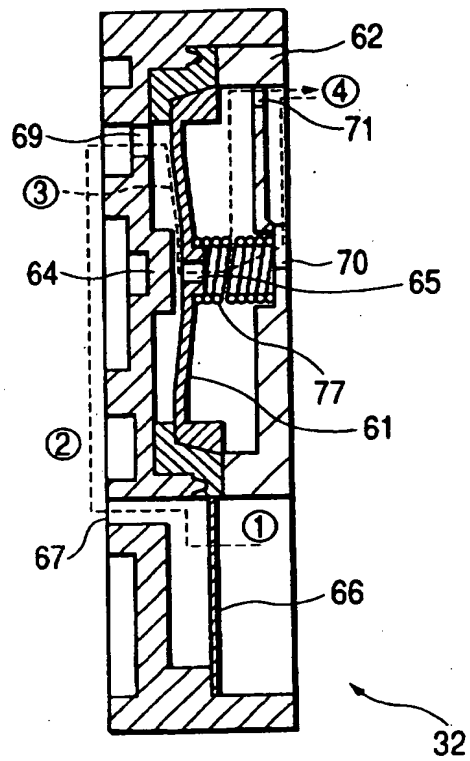


FIG. 9

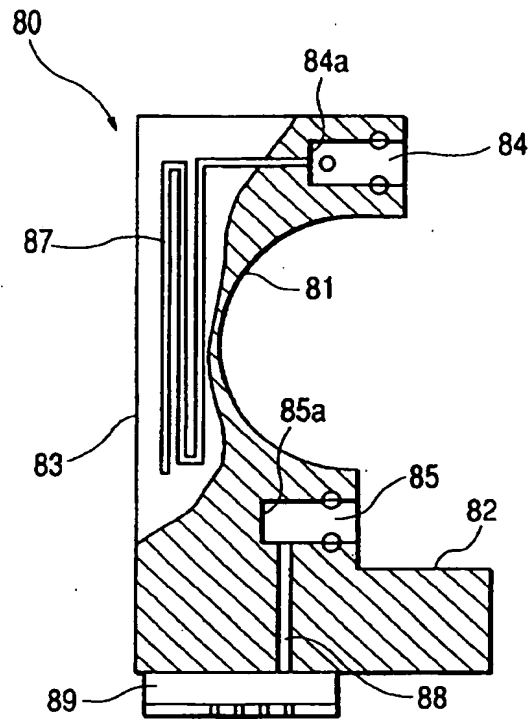


FIG. 10

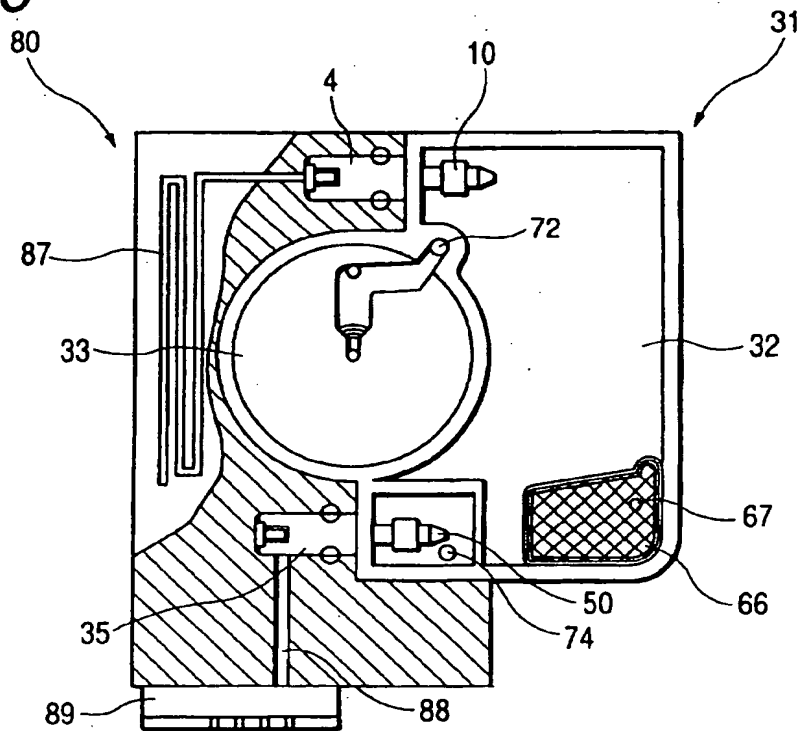


FIG. 11

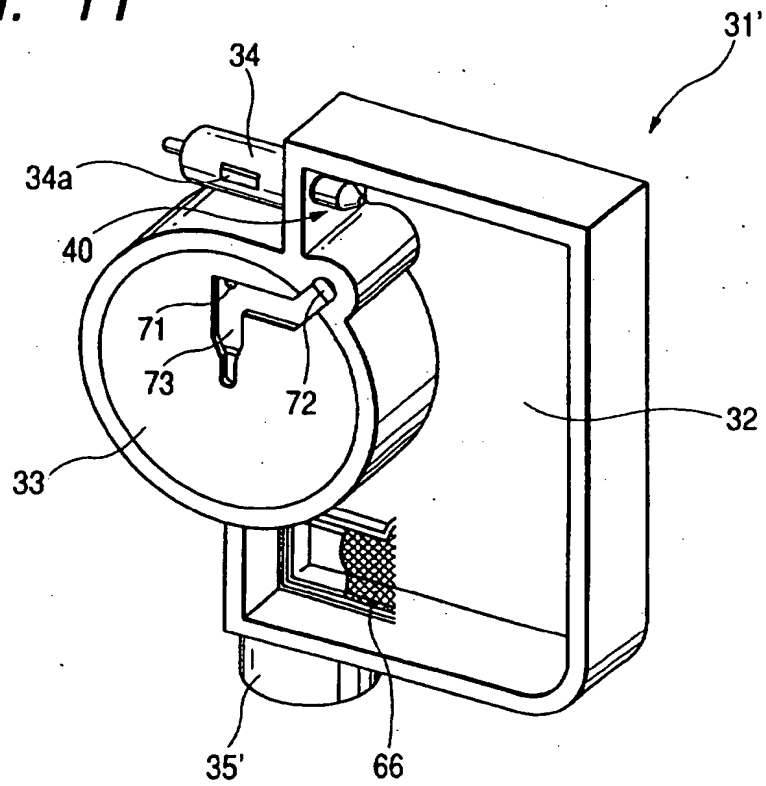


FIG. 12

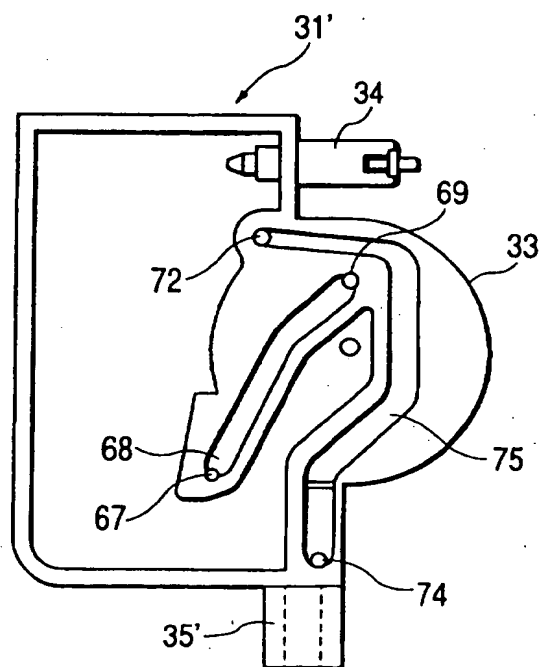


FIG. 13

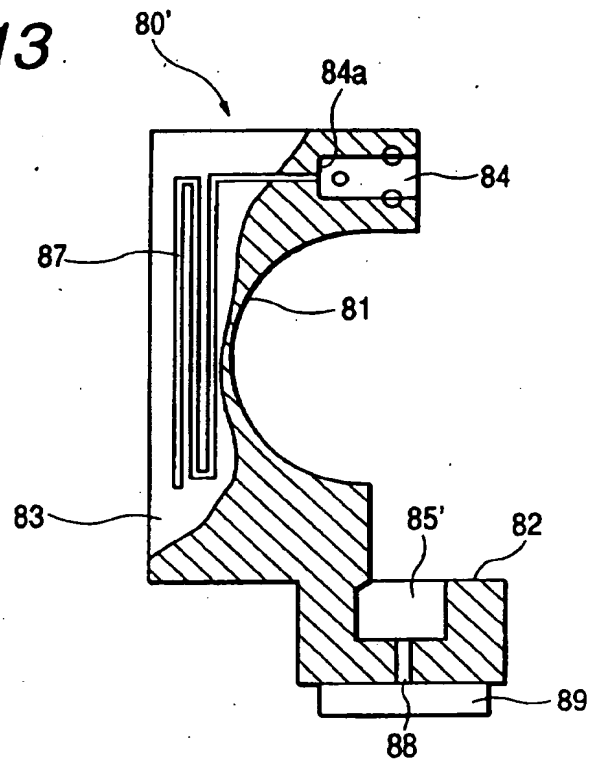


FIG. 14

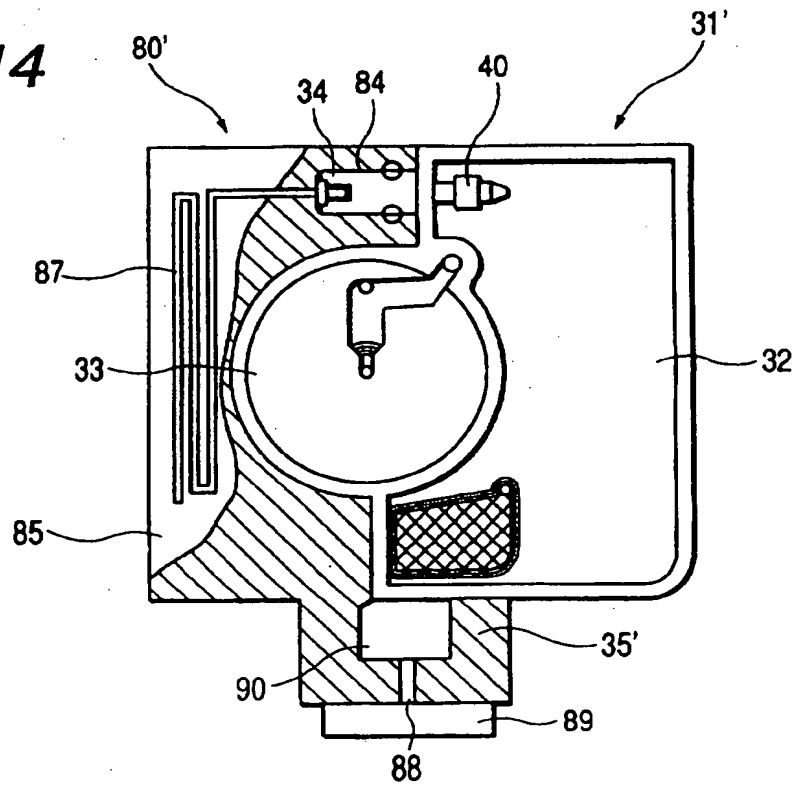


FIG. 15

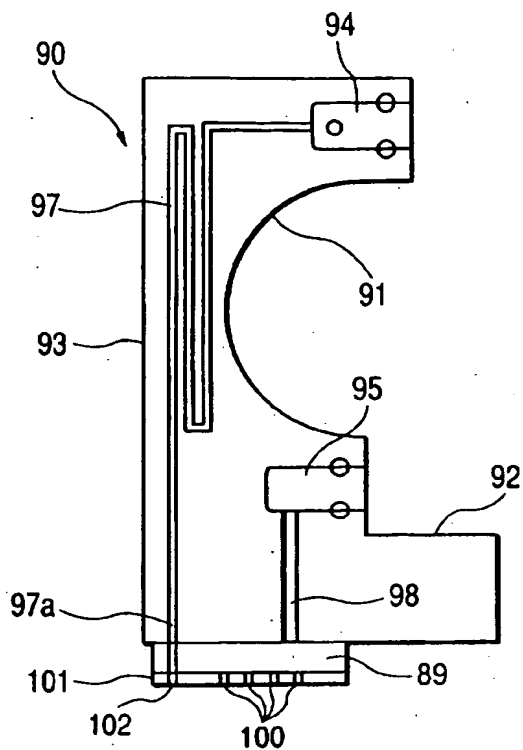


FIG. 16

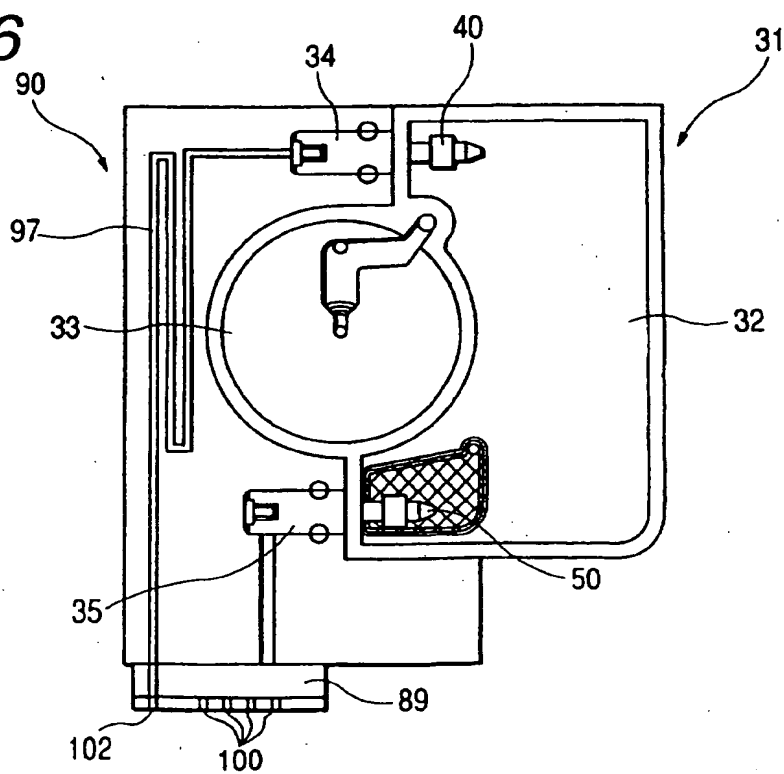


FIG. 17A

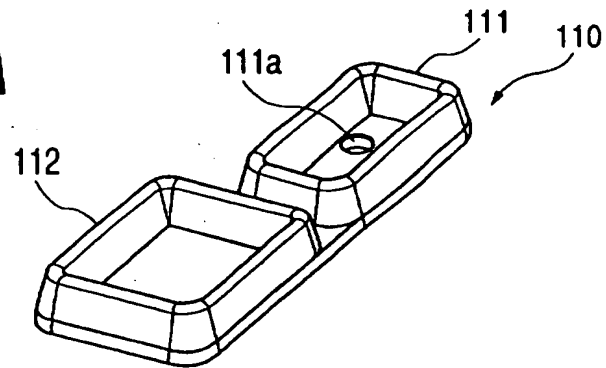


FIG. 17B

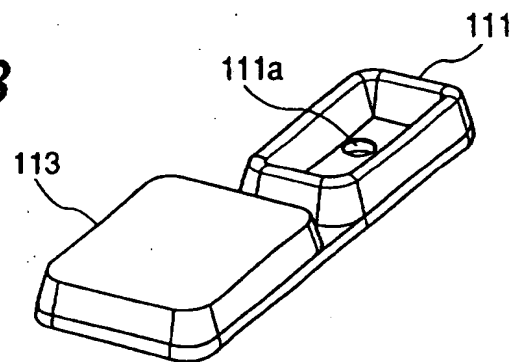


FIG. 18A

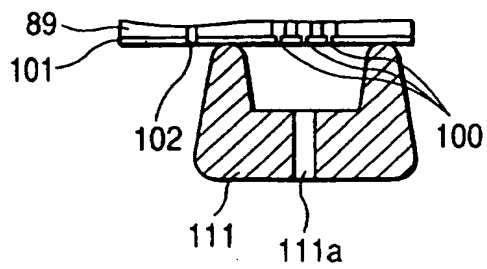


FIG. 18B

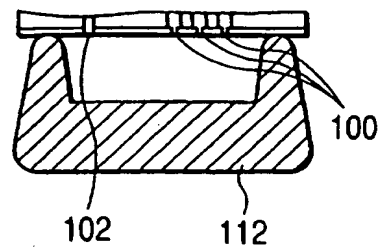


FIG. 19A

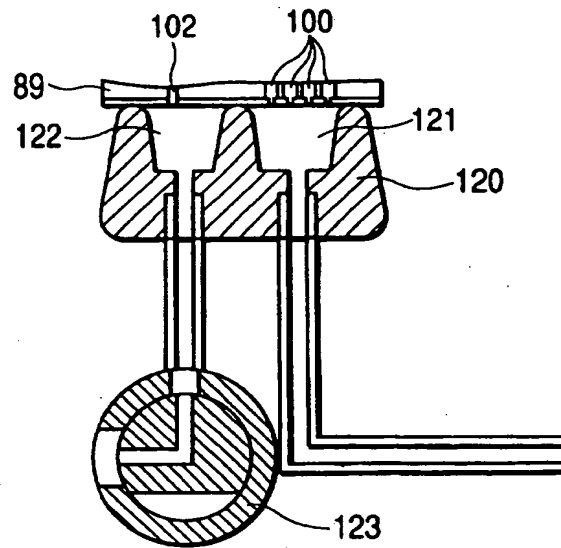


FIG. 19B

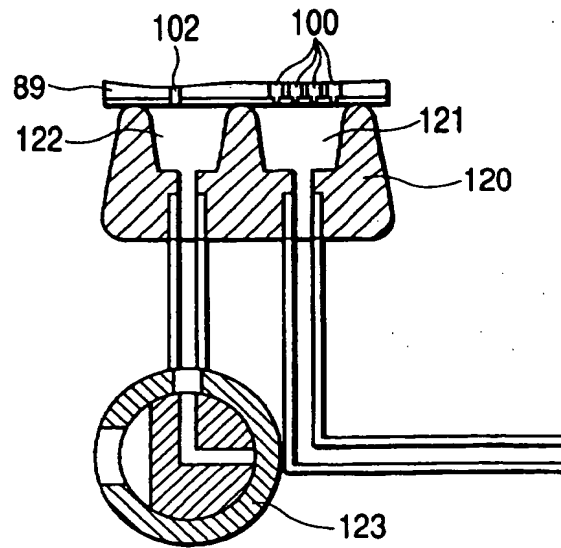


FIG. 20

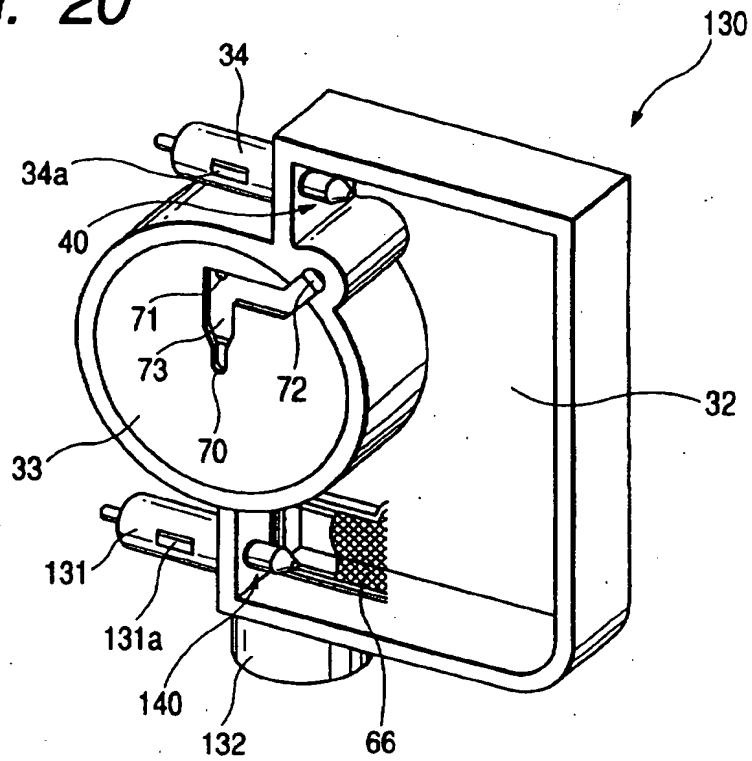


FIG. 21

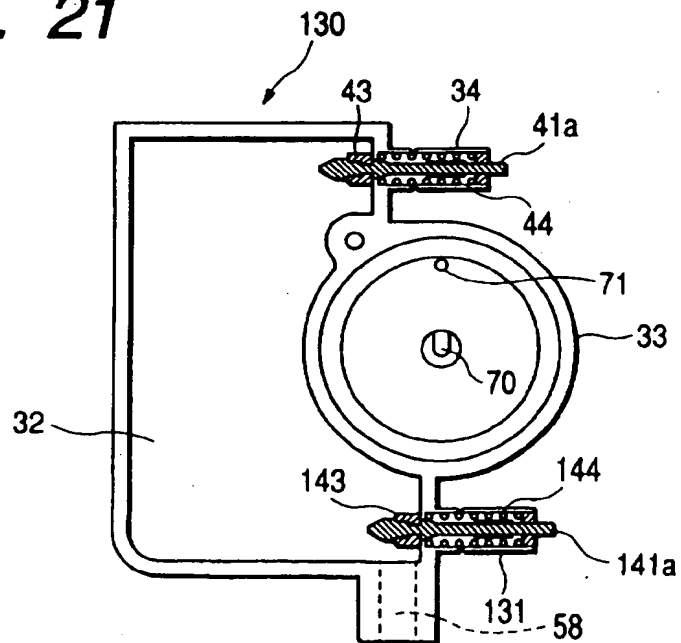


FIG. 22

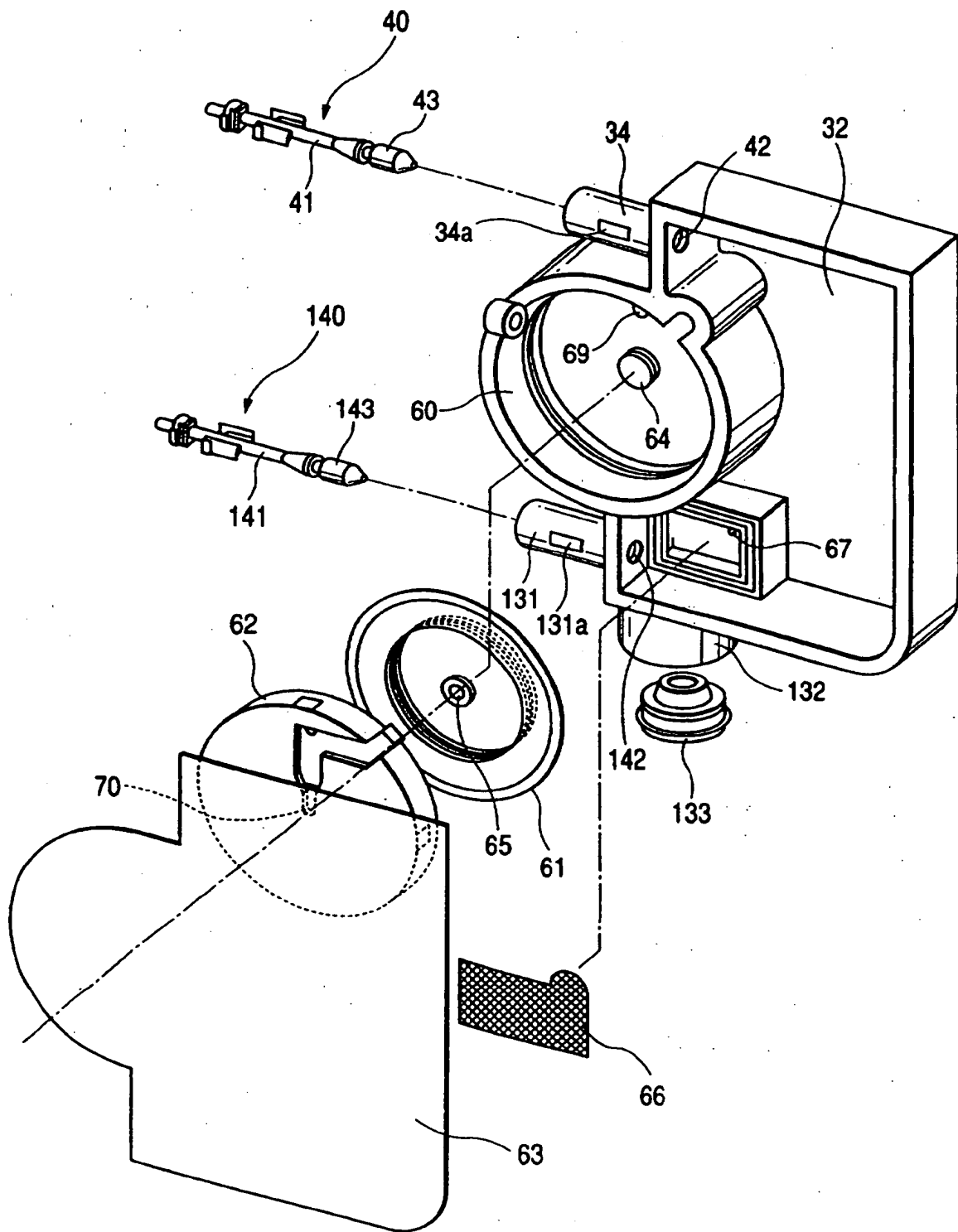


FIG. 23A

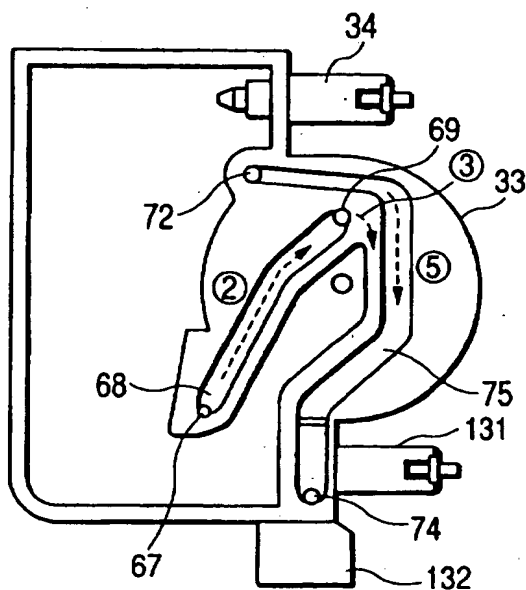


FIG. 23B

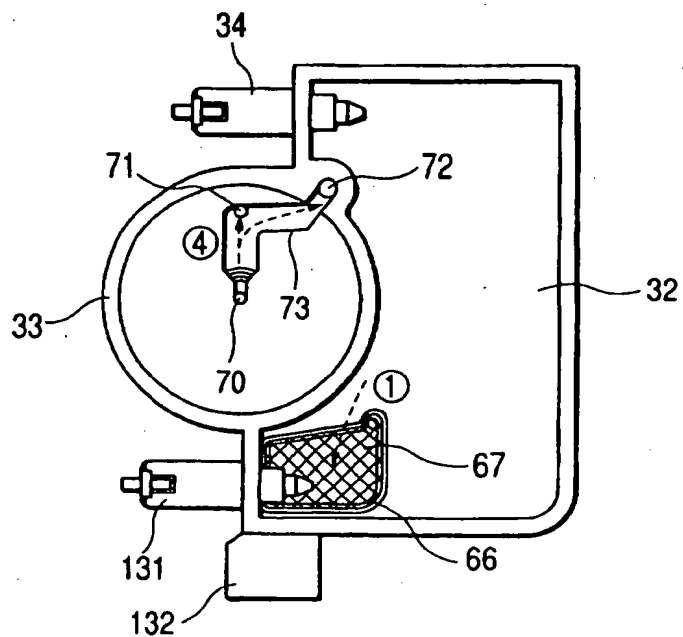


FIG. 24A

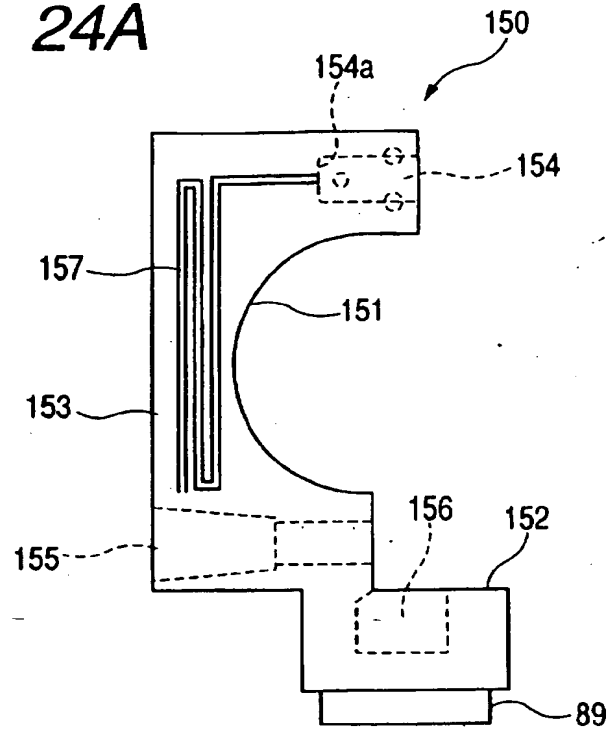


FIG. 24B

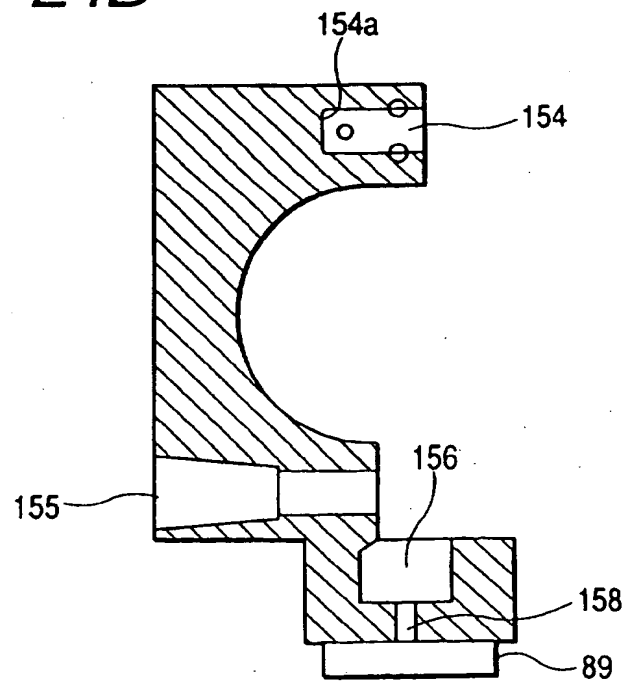


FIG. 25A

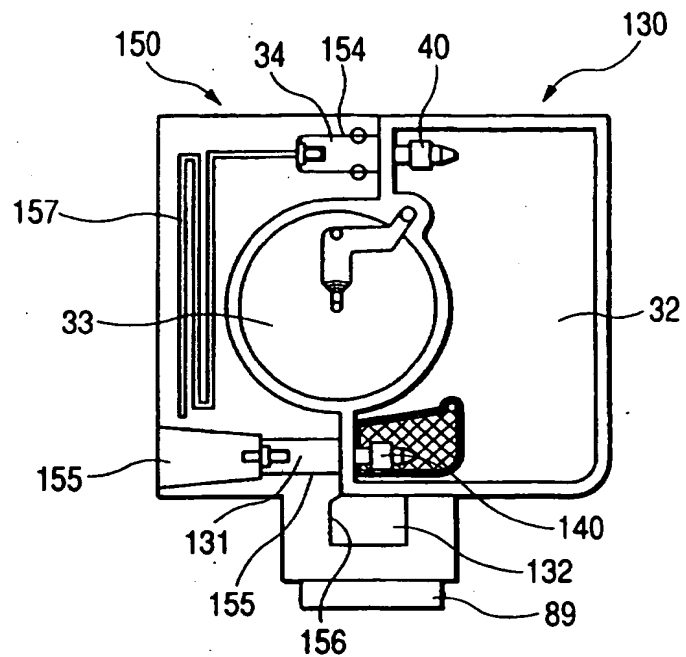


FIG. 25B

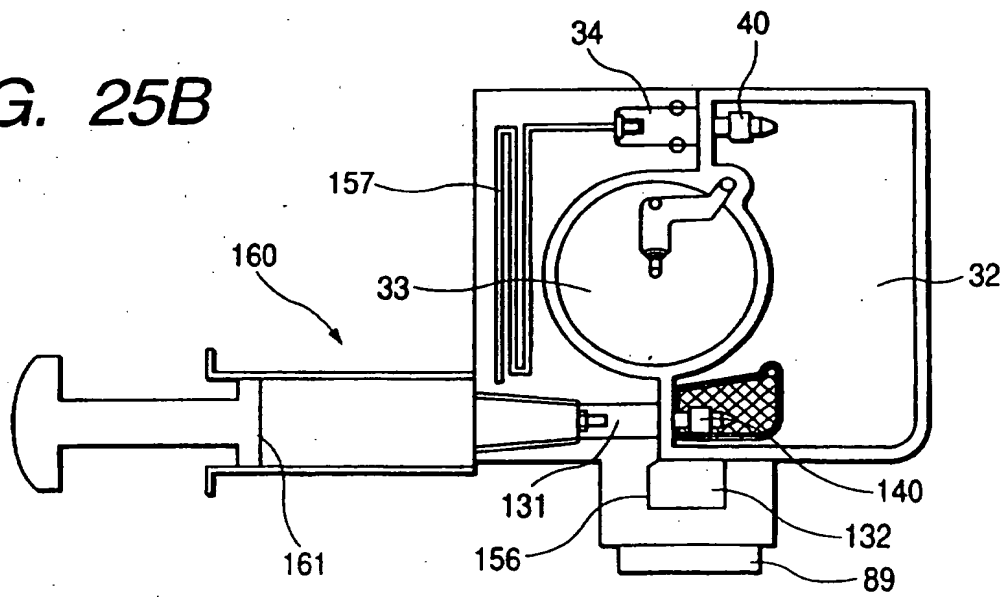


FIG. 25C

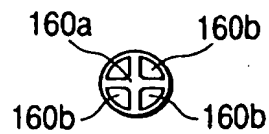


FIG. 26A

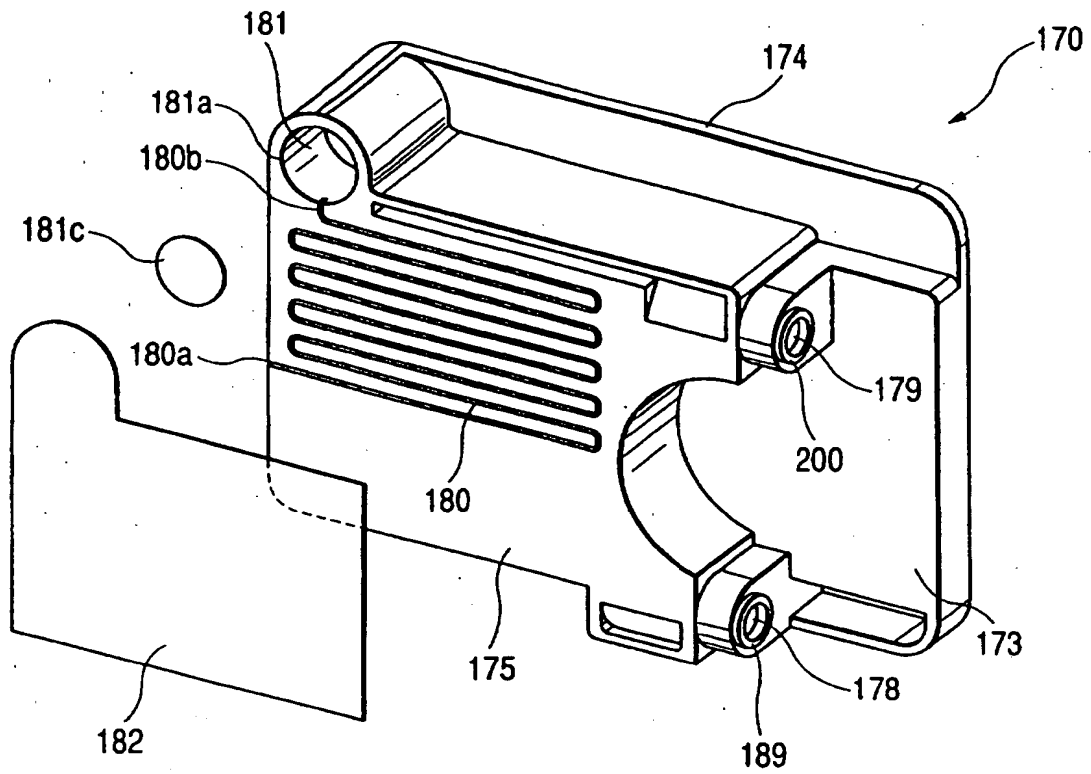


FIG. 26B

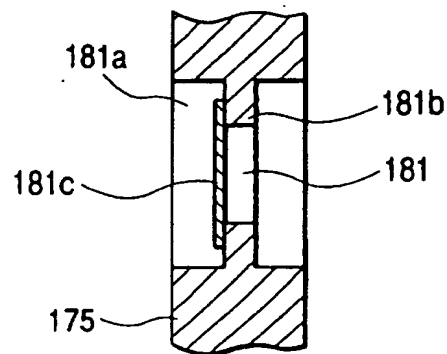


FIG. 27

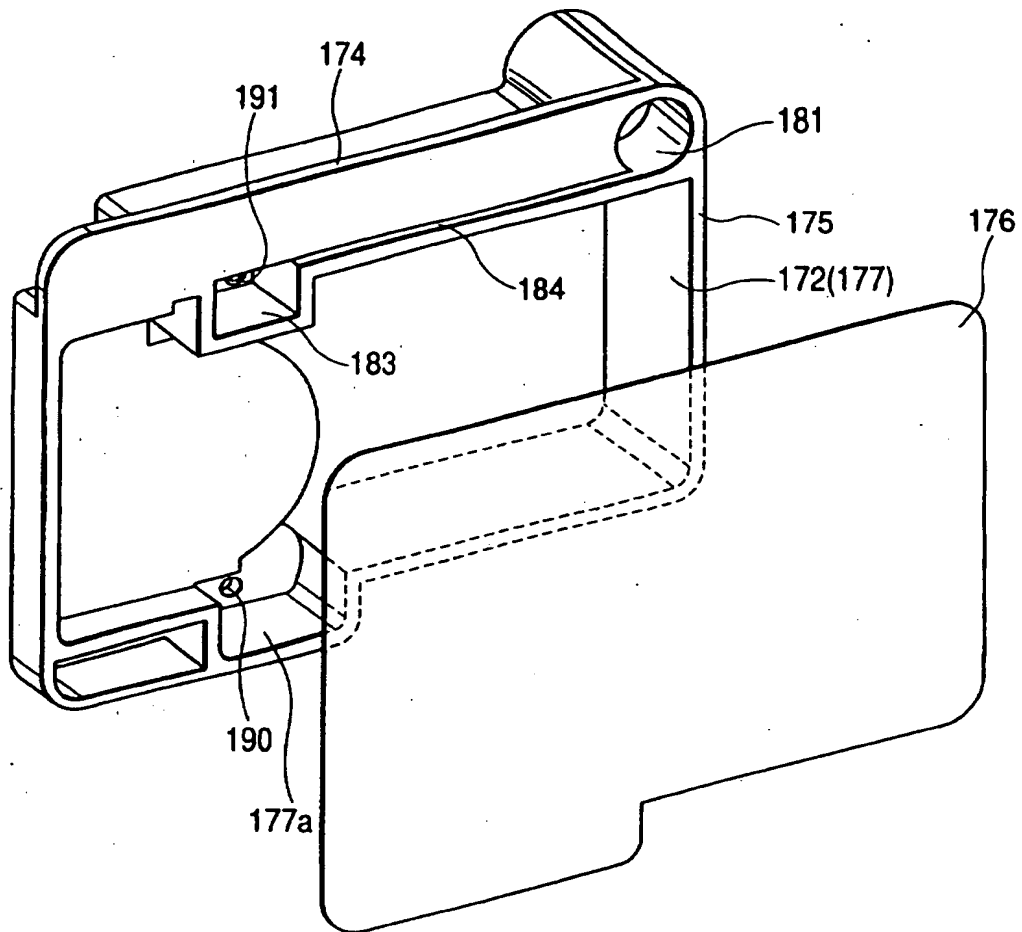


FIG. 28

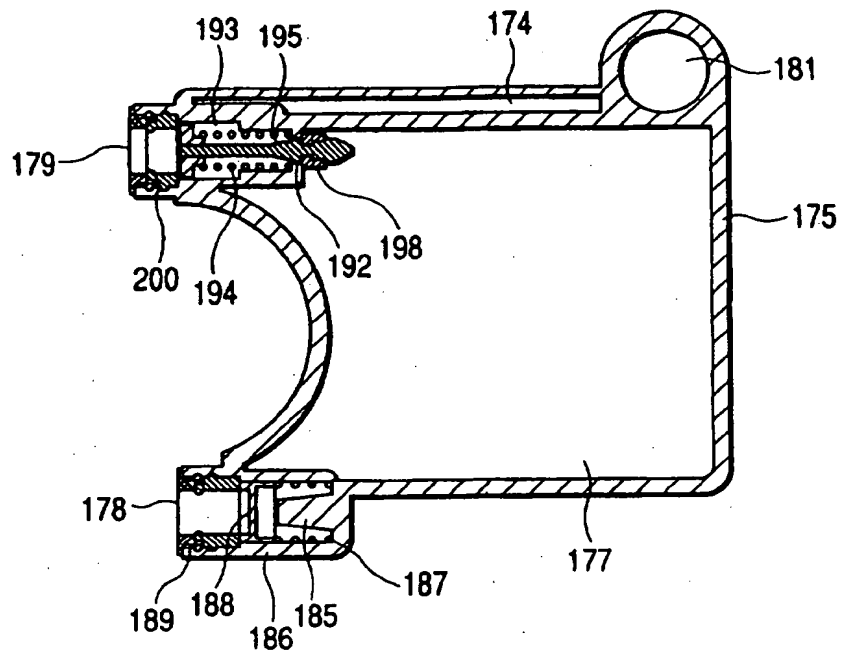


FIG. 29A

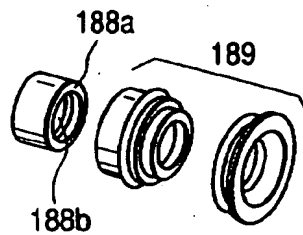


FIG. 29B

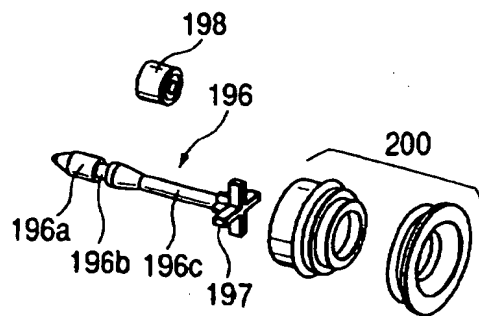


FIG. 30

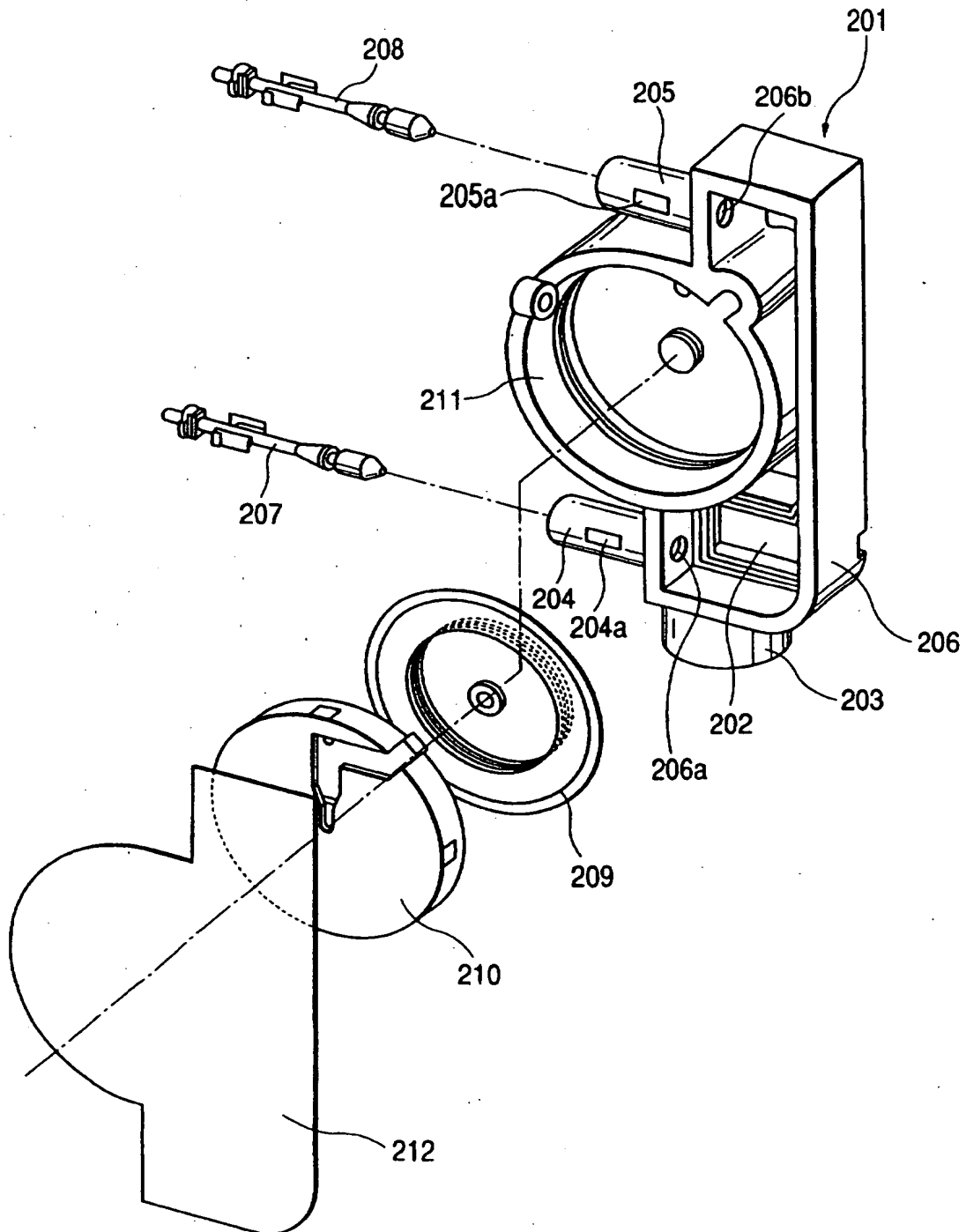


FIG. 31

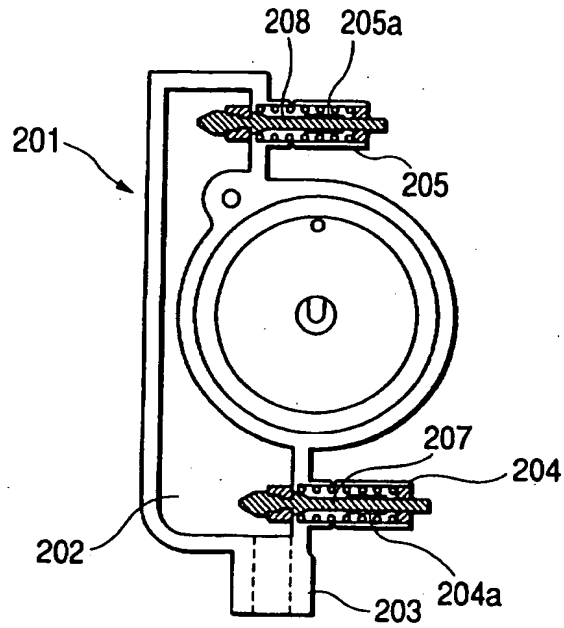


FIG. 32

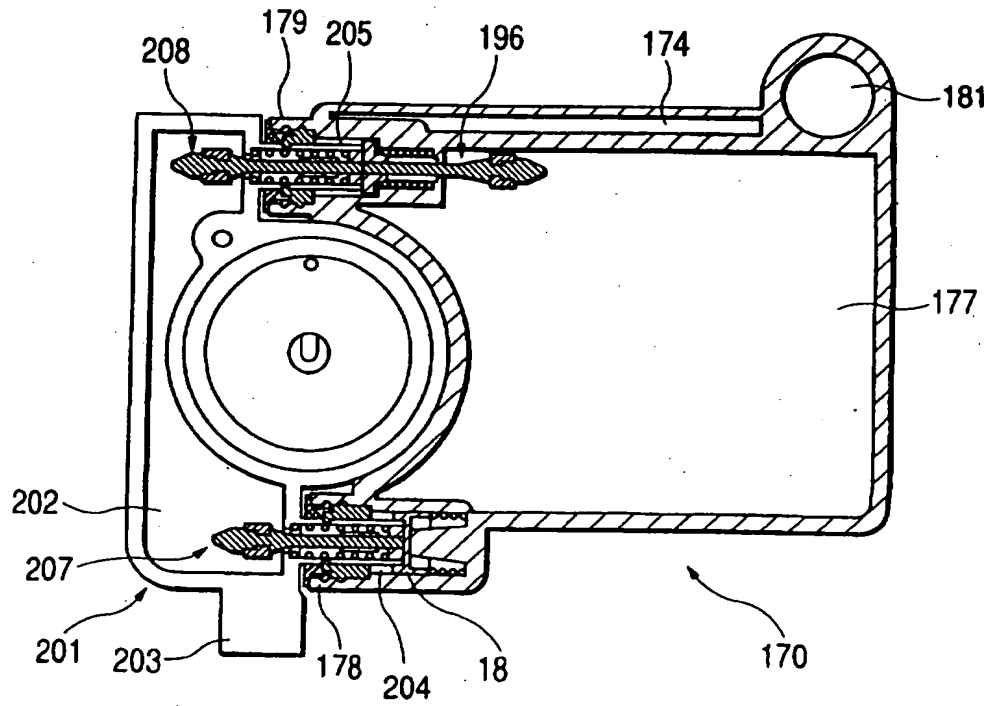


FIG. 33A

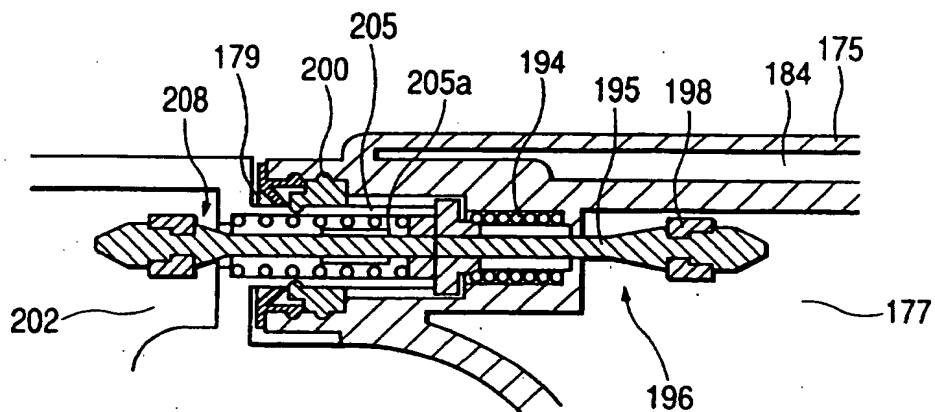


FIG. 33B

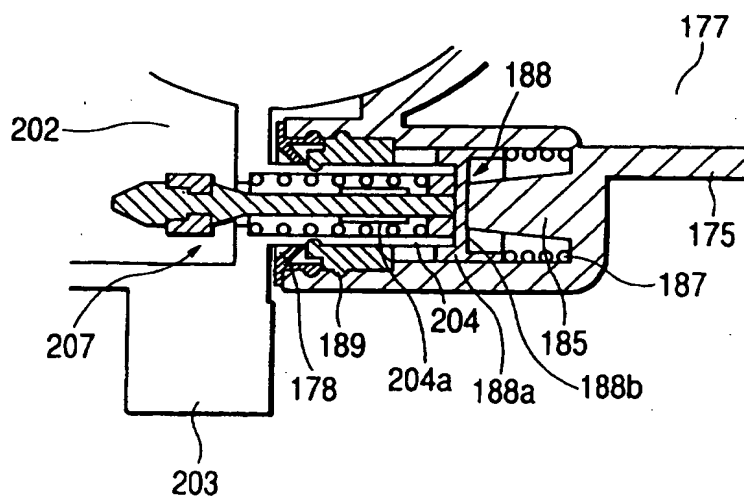


FIG. 34A

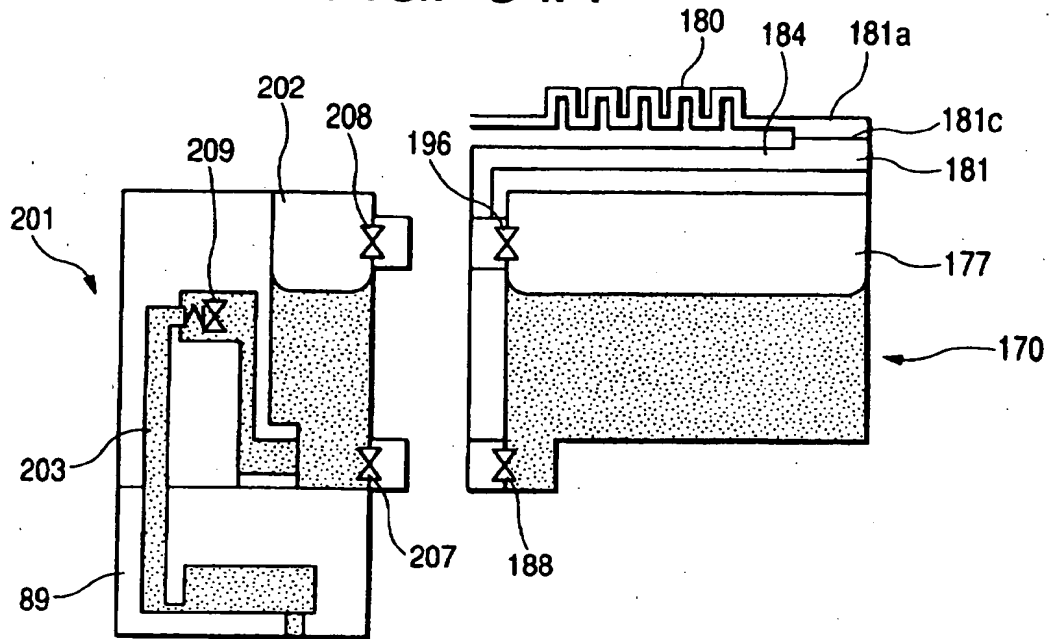


FIG. 34B

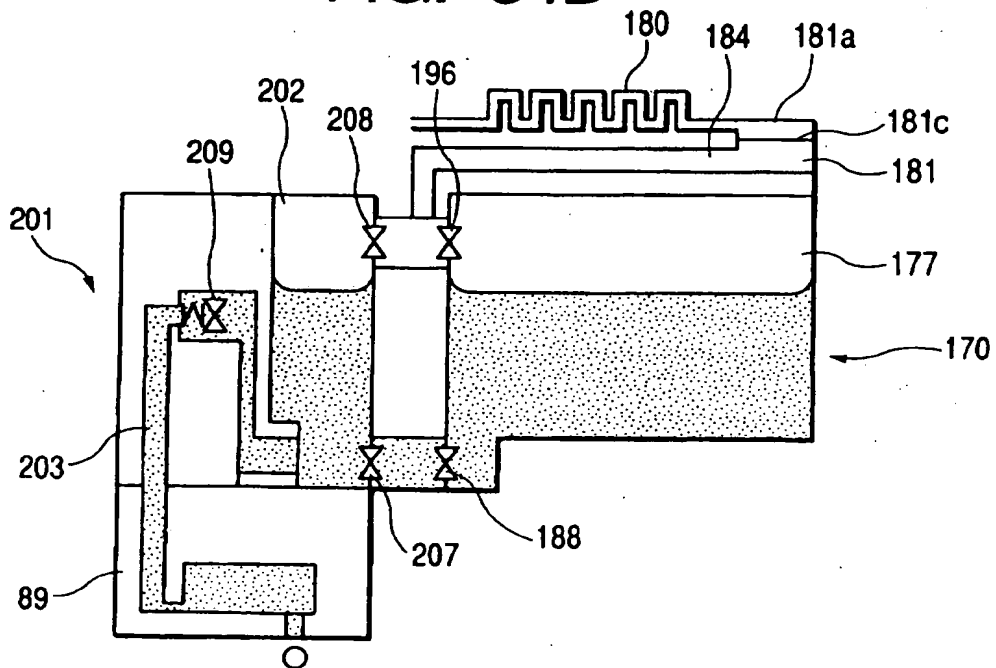


FIG. 35A

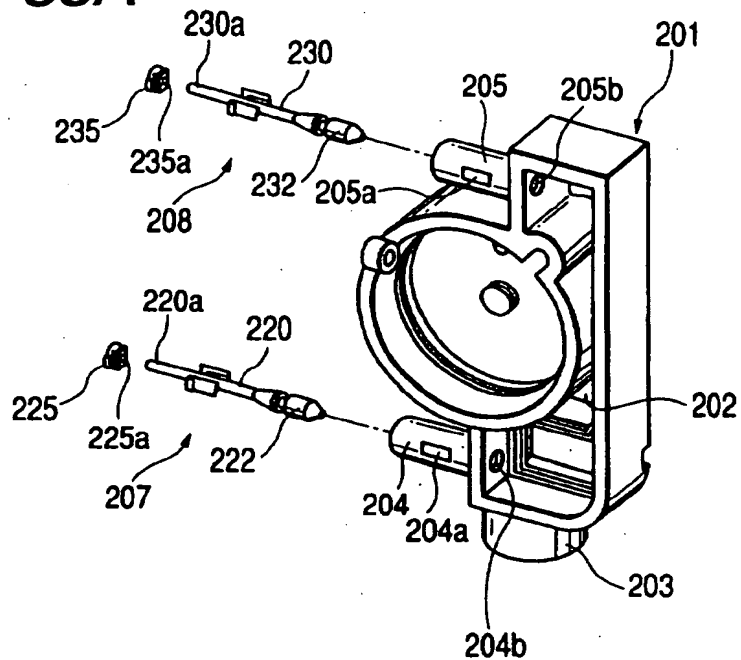


FIG. 35B

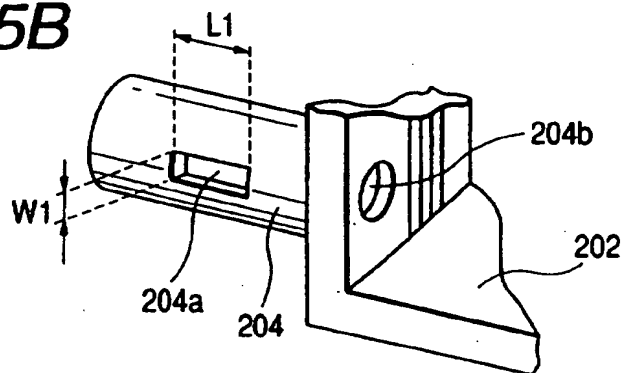


FIG. 35C

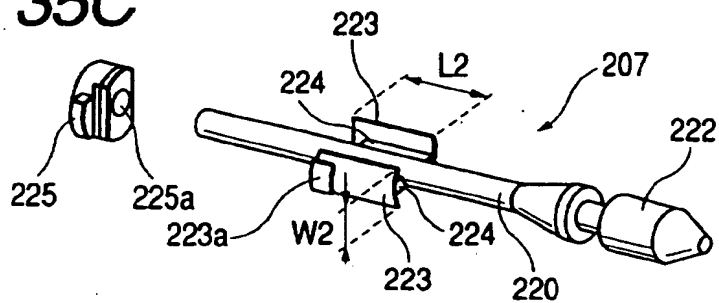


FIG. 36A

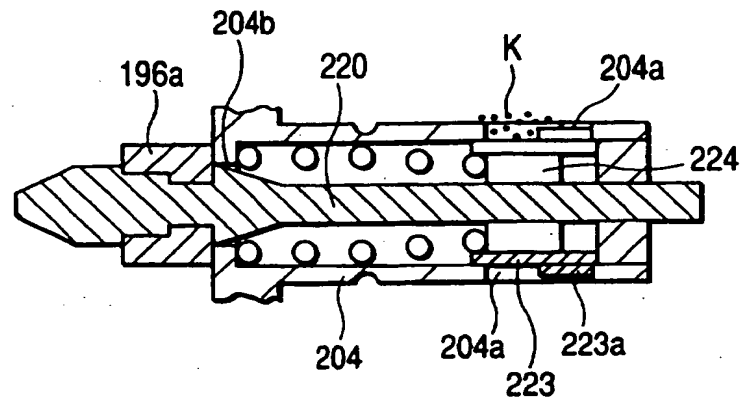


FIG. 36B

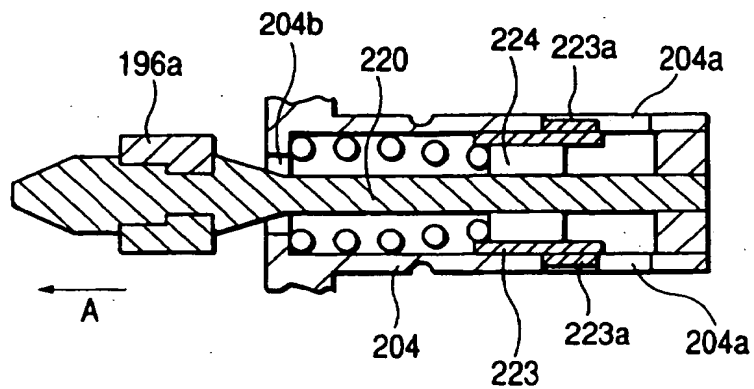


FIG. 37

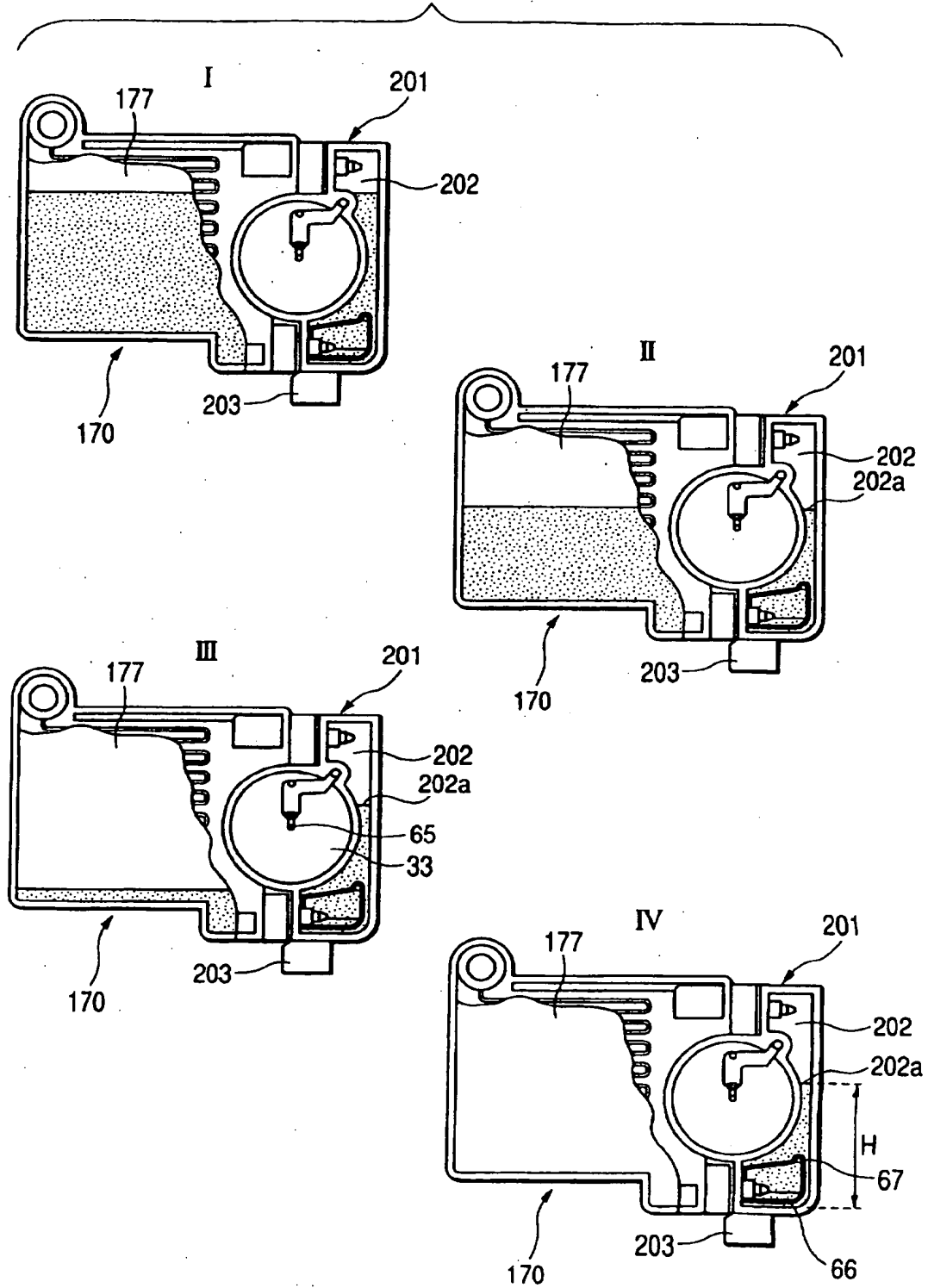


FIG. 38

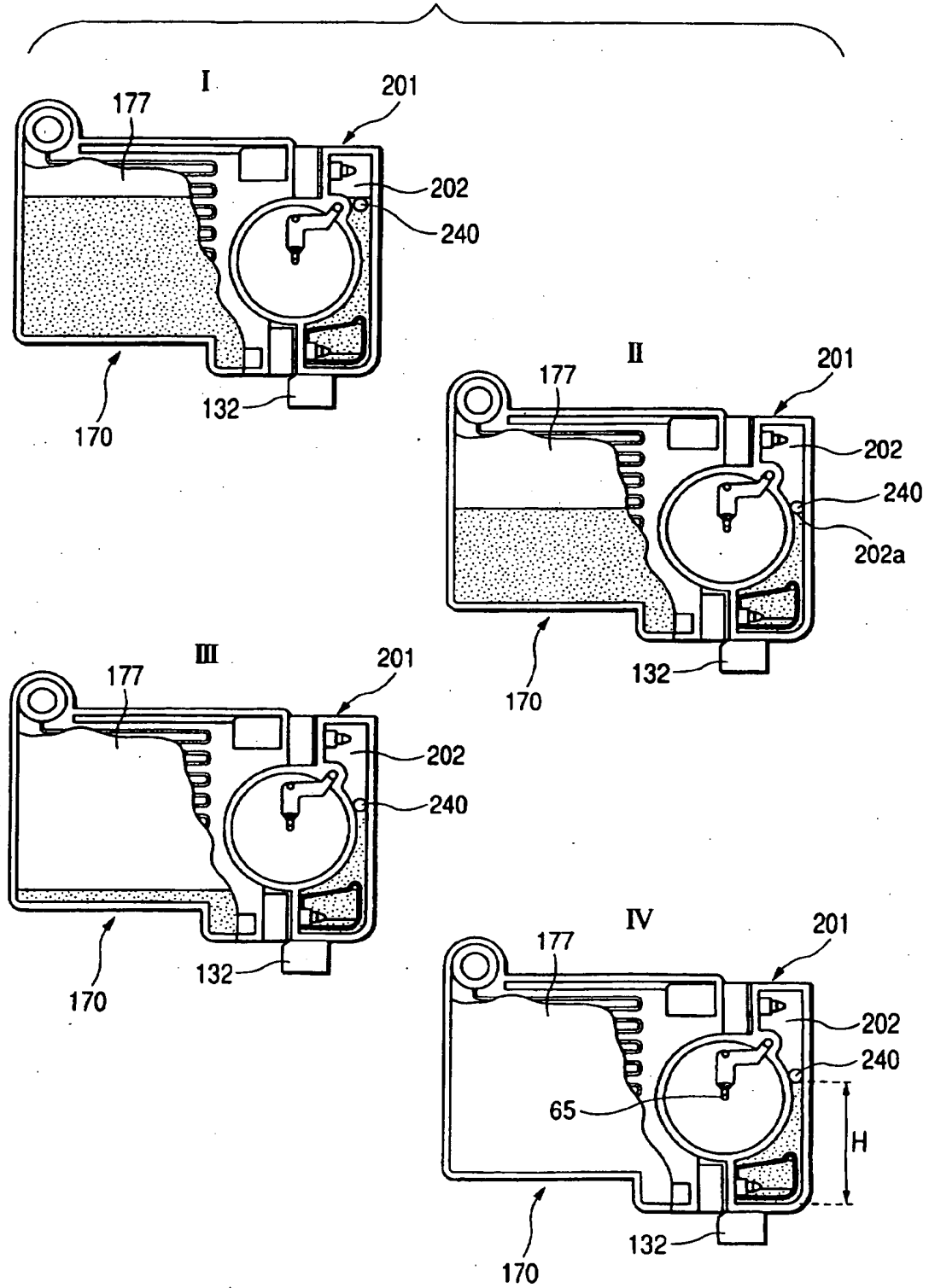


FIG. 39

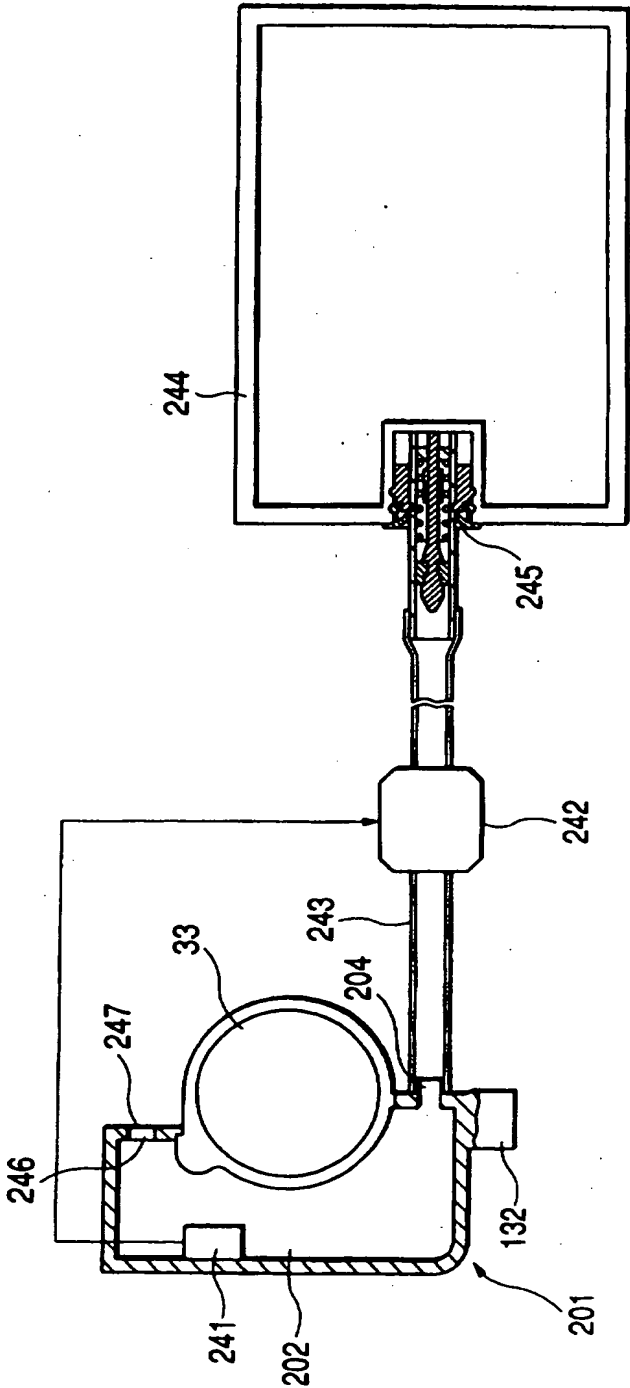


FIG. 40

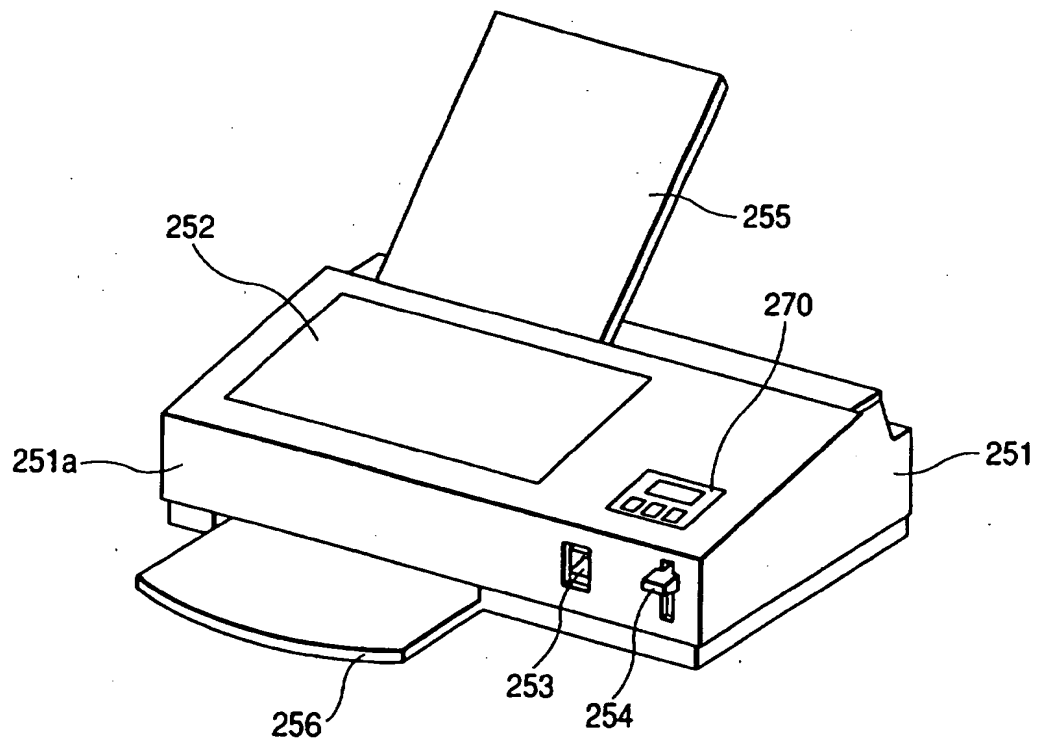


FIG. 41A

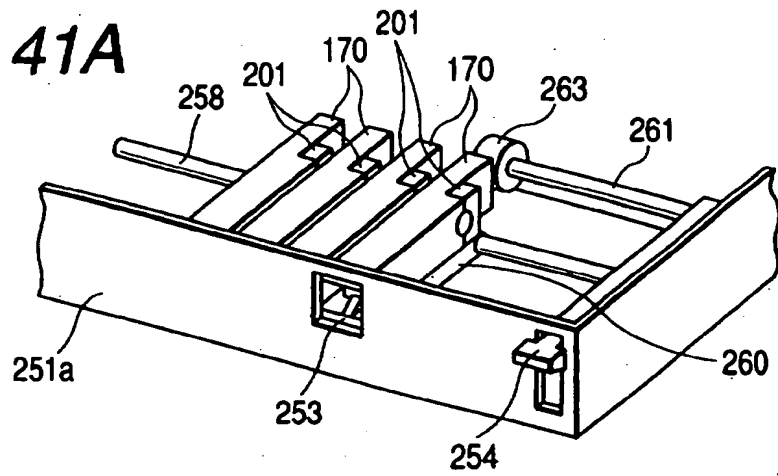


FIG. 41B

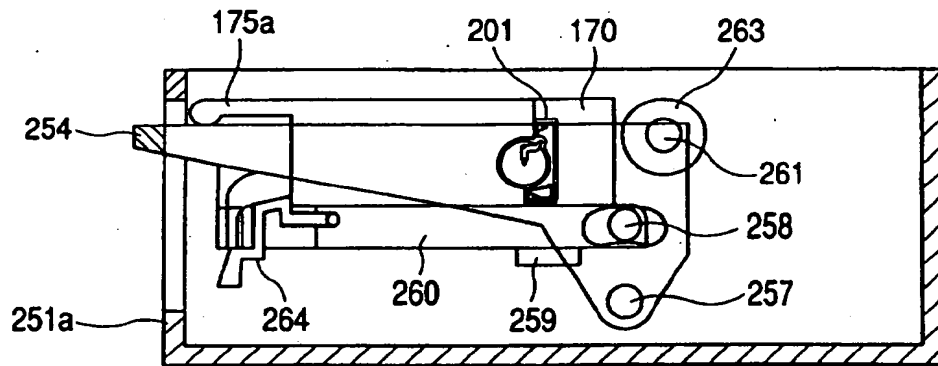


FIG. 41C

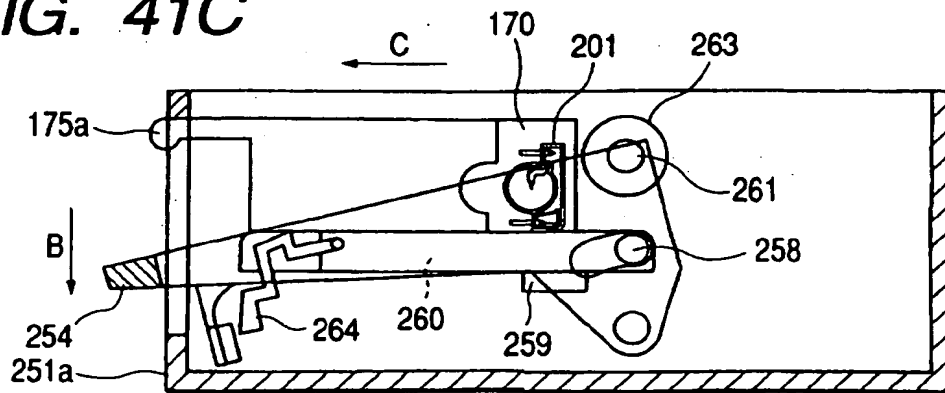


FIG. 42A

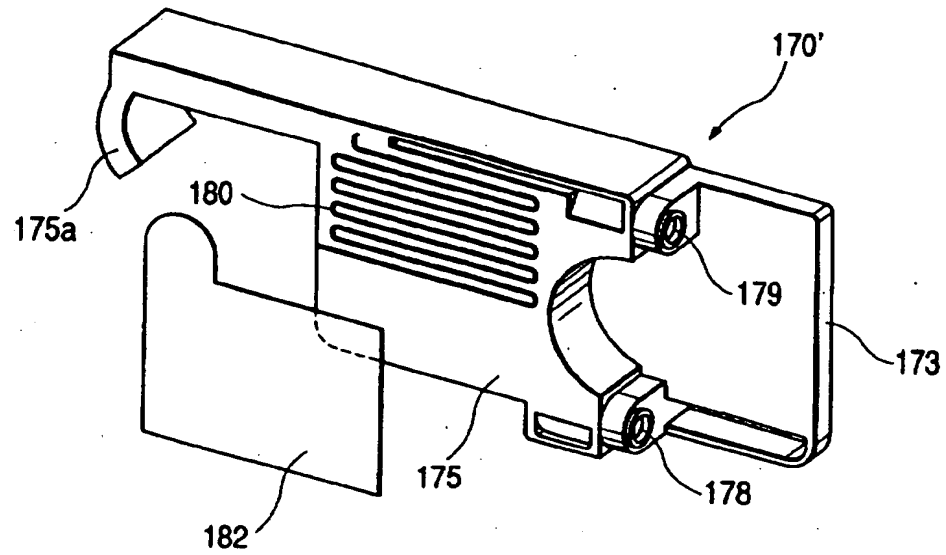


FIG. 42B

